

# BBC Audience Councils' responses to the bbc.co.uk service review public consultation

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## **Audience Council England**



### **SUBMISSION TO THE BBC TRUST:**

### **SERVICE REVIEW CONSULTATION FOR [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk)**

#### Overall

Public expectations of [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) were high and were met with the provision of an up-to-date news service, ease of navigation with fully operational links, and reliable, trustworthy information of high quality. Council members were heavy users of the service which was described as distinctive and innovative, although not perhaps at the cutting edge of new technology. It was an immense resource, widely seen as the best source for impartial and accurate online news with a high standard of journalism and covering a wide range of subjects.

The service was seen as vital for connecting with young people and encouraging them to discover other parts of the BBC, and as such was an essential investment, a 'must do', for the corporation.

In a fast-moving market, it was important that the service licence retain flexibility to ensure that the service could continue to meet users' expectations.

#### Meeting the Public Purposes

Members believed that the service made significant contributions to the BBC's *Citizenship* and *Education & Learning* public purposes, both in itself and in acting as an intelligent portal to other linked websites, internal and external to the BBC.

There was a great deal of content linked to and independent of programming which indirectly supported lifelong learning; members would like to see more production and commissioning of quality content to support both direct and indirect education and learning. The BBC News country guides, the sadly now demised city guides, and the science and psychology sites provided excellent examples. Members were not convinced that this content necessarily had to form 'part of cross-media propositions...'; what mattered was producing BBC content that was high quality and was used, whatever the platform.

From the perspective of the Creativity and Emerging Communications purposes, new developments were apparent across the service as illustrated by recent additions of embedded videos on the BBC News site and a live link to BBC News 24. There was a view that digital take up should be the responsibility of the market and government via Digital UK, which was part-funded by the BBC.

The service also met the Representing the UK, its nations, regions and communities public purpose through its geographically based links including those for the local radio and regional television services in England.

With the retreat of ITV from regional news services, the BBC was now seen by many as the only real comprehensive provider of broadcast local news with diverse subjects represented in terms of area, religions and activities. However, it was felt that the *Where I Live* local output needed more investment and development, for example with local sports coverage. At present the sport link on the local BBC websites redirected to the national site rather than picking up on local sports. There had also been considerable disappointment at the loss of local entertainment listings following the last review of the service.

The service met the *Bringing the world to the UK and the UK to the world* purpose well. The BBC site was one of the most trusted and informative sites for world news and members' anecdotal evidence showed that the BBC news content was more trusted and seen as unbiased in comparison with news services from US broadcasters.

### Ease of use and navigation

The website was easy to search and navigate, even for the inexperienced online user, and little specialist knowledge was required but using the links sometimes caused problems. Perhaps the BBC could take a lead in helping other service providers achieve the same standards.

Difficulties were experienced with both the iPlayer and the Realplayer software for listening online, often despite fast broadband connections; these gave rise to user frustration.

The BBC needed to stay ahead of the game and there was a view that the decision to use Windows Media Player and Realplayer instead of developing specialist BBC software had been short-sighted. It was not simply a matter of poor performance; the information they provided was of value, allowing companies such as Microsoft and Sony to collect data on what we were watching or listening to. Had the BBC developed its own software, this information could have been collected and used to improve quality and possibly generate income, but it had given the facility away.

There were mixed views on the search function, with some members praising the strength of [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) as a search engine which those who used it regularly felt was on a par with the Google search engine; others found it compared poorly, even when searching for BBC programming. Some members would like to see an enhancement of the search tool to allow more user specificity, for example narrowing searches by date and Boolean searching.

Three aspects of accessibility were raised: possible barriers to use through limited levels of literacy; limited amount of IT knowledge; and the service's accessibility by non-licence payers with implications for the future of the licence fee.

### Content

The distinctiveness, innovation and value of the service scored very well and there were several instances where content was deemed to be of high quality, original, challenging and engaging but this was not sustained across all output.

Members valued the enrichment of content through the offering of audio and video material from BBC radio and television programmes, the high degree of interactivity, and the regional links and local content. However this latter material was sometimes found to be out-of date and of poorer quality.

The CBBC site's range of tools and games was exceptional and the breadth of content 'amazing'. One member with a three and a five year old felt that the service explored the educational potential fully both through the stimulating and inviting content and through the incentive to develop keyboard and wider computer skills.

There was some concern as to how this resource could be sustained but members felt strongly about the importance to the BBC of doing so, as it was one of the most effective ways of engaging with the consumers of tomorrow.

Making content available via links specially designed to be attractive to young people was essential if they were to be drawn towards news, politics and educational material.

Members would like to see an extension of the on-demand services and the BBC archive, assuming this could be funded by the licence fee. The focus for the BBC should be on retaining and producing the highest quality material whether linked or not to programming, particularly in areas where users were poorly served by other online media outlets.

User generated content was viewed as less than impressive. It was perceived as being limited to audience reaction to BBC programmes or to reporters and presenters' blogs, with little original content from licence fee payers. More projects such as the *People's War*, which recorded eye witness testimony resulting in a unique social and historical record, should be encouraged on a range of topics to suit all ages, social and cultural backgrounds.

The *Schools News Day* project was also highlighted as an example of nurturing talent with its strong support from the BBC, but there were questions about how much it delivered value for money and its impact on young users who could so easily upload their work on other websites such as *YouTube*.

Council members had observed the way young friends and family members were using the internet, and made a number of comments. Among them was a suggestion that if the BBC wanted to be relevant to young people in the future, it should consider creating a Yahoo or MSN messenger style service alongside its search engine and server, to encourage people to log on via the BBC site with its online news.

#### Effectiveness of the service licence

The service licence was generally felt to be effective. It was similar to other BBC service licences but did not seem to fully reflect that certain aspects of this particular service and its platform were very different, including its context.

In the light of previous events, the licence would need to be revisited regularly to ensure that its effectiveness was maintained in a fast-moving market and that the expectations of users were being met.

With the increase in provision of on-demand audio and video streams of programming, questions about the principle of the licence fee would become more urgent, and with it the need to protect the interests of licence fee paying members of the public.

There was a suggestion that both [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) and iPlayer might benefit from having their own performance and reach targets, perhaps in part based on site hits.

There was little information on how resources could or should be deployed, and members wondered whether this gave management and programme makers too much freedom to move away from the overall framework for the service. Did it take into account the recent lapses of editorial judgement? Perhaps a tighter system of checks on quality and brand values should form part of the service licence.

Service licences were described as emerging tools, somewhat formulaic and open ended. The important point would be to demonstrate how the BBC was being held to account by the BBC Trust and audiences.

### Accountability

With regard to the BBC's accountability, the service was recognised as a useful tool for putting information into the public domain and for providing opportunities for feedback. While these were welcome, they did not tend to offer dialogue with programme makers; the communication was usually one way.

Some reservations were expressed about the Trust's use of the website with this consultation cited as an example. While it was quite properly published on the Trust pages, the suggestion was made that it should also be advertised on the main home, local and/or news pages in order to attract a wide range of respondents. The addition of the Trust and Audience Councils' websites would go some way in informing people that they were represented but more could be done to show the activity at grassroots level as well as by the Trust itself.

There was also concern that not enough information on how the licence fee is spent was available. It was not sufficient for the broad population to be offered the Annual Report as a pdf file, and the information that was available appeared to be 'buried' on the Trust's web pages; the BBC's business and financial activity should be given more prominence.

In terms of measuring accountability, the licence may need to be more explicit about competitive issues. For example it seems reasonable for the BBC to use its news gathering capability to produce content, but less so if it used its financial strength and resources to move into areas where the commercial sector was trying to develop business and where there was only a tangential link to other BBC services.

The proof for greater accountability will be to demonstrate how the BBC and the Trust respond to user feedback and concerns. One important consideration would be how audience satisfaction would be tested and collected in the future.

### Changes to the service licence

It is only natural that the service licence be developed and amended over time. For example, should the *MyLocalNow* proposition be approved by the Trust, there would need to be further consideration of the service licence as that new service impacted on [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk).

Another consideration was the need to ensure that the significant number of licence fee payers who do not have internet access were not excluded from BBC output but could obtain some benefit from traditional broadcasting platforms.

In conclusion, perhaps there should be less emphasis on [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) being a direct driver for digital and broadband uptake. Whilst the BBC has always been at the forefront of emerging technologies, the principal focus for all BBC services, including [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk), should be on high quality and distinctive content. Members were not convinced that the BBC always needed to 'develop a deeper relationship' with its audiences for every last nuance of content.

*29.11.07*

**AUDIENCE COUNCIL NORTHERN IRELAND**

**SUBMISSION TO BBC TRUST**

**BBC.CO.UK SERVICE REVIEW**

**DECEMBER 2007**

**A. Executive Summary**

**Appreciation:** Overall there was a high level of appreciation for this comprehensive and trustworthy service. News, sport, weather, community, music and education sites were among the key drivers of usage. The [bbc.co.uk/ni](http://bbc.co.uk/ni) site was considered valuable and most users seemed to slip easily between it and other parts of the service.

**Public Purposes:** Council found that the service reflected the Public Purposes well, particularly Citizenship, Education and reflecting Nations, Regions and Communities. It also notes the particular opportunities this platform offers for Bringing the UK to the World and the World to the UK.

**Media Literacy:** Council noted that the availability of [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) and its discussion on television and radio platforms had contributed much to digital media literacy in the UK - particularly in helping the public understand URLs. Yet, Council is also aware that there are sections of the audience who find the service difficult to access. A group of senior citizens expressed interest in a range of content but needed additional support to find their way into this complex site. Other consultees with hearing impairment had a low awareness of [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) or did not use the service at all and requested facilities which would make it more accessible to them, such as more subtitles for programmes on demand and better links into [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) content from existing websites serving their community. Council believes that there should be enhanced activity to support media literacy and digital inclusion in partnership with other organisations. It noted that underserved groups could be among those with most to gain from the content available on the website. It further observed that media literacy levels in Northern Ireland are relatively low compared with other parts of the UK across several main indicators – and so this is a particular priority for audiences in Northern Ireland.

**Younger audiences:** Council noted the value which many young people place on the internet as a means of retrieving information, supporting their studies, providing entertainment and enabling interactivity and social networking. It believes that it is vital that [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) keeps pace with the demands and consumer patterns of these

young age groups in order to provide them with value through BBC content with which they might otherwise not engage through other platforms.

**bbc.co.uk/ni:** The local website was found to be a particularly important part of the service, with good links and integration to other parts of bbc.co.uk. Council particularly noted the benefits of Communities websites, providing opportunities for users to share their stories and interact across communities and generations. Council appreciates that local web content can achieve quality and popularity to rival content on national areas of the site, and wishes to see BBC Northern Ireland achieve its share of commissioning.

**Navigation and Ease of Use:** Council received feedback that overall navigation was considered to be good and links to external sites were useful and well researched. These characteristics were highly valued by the audience and appeared to add to their appreciation of the BBC as a trusted guide. Some users felt that Google provided better search facilities and a better launchpad into BBC content. Whilst overall the site was considered as a benchmark in reliability there have also been frustrations with the reliability of Listen Again and blog commenting services, the provision of usability functions for iPlayer and issues with updating content such as sports results.

**Innovation and Distinctiveness:** Consultees provided examples of innovation in content and associated technology. Given the comprehensive and extensive nature of the site it wondered whether all parts of the site lived up to these expectations and what processes were in place to rationalise and focus investment on the parts of the service which added most value and most closely reflected the BBC's Public Purposes.

**Service licence:** Council agrees that this service requires its own service licence and suggests that it might carry annexes for local sites. The service licence must remain flexible to adapt with changes in consumer patterns and technology.

## **B. Evidence Base**

The Audience Council has actively engaged with the audience in Northern Ireland to ensure that its advice is informed by a diverse range of views. Its submission reflects views expressed through the BBC Trust online consultation and through the Council's own, heavily promoted, online questionnaire. Over 50 responses were received online from audiences in Northern Ireland.

Council also hosted an Accountability Breakfast with stakeholders representing a variety of interests including education, digital inclusion, media literacy, consumer interests and business.

It benefited further from an accountability event with a diverse range of users including people with disabilities such as hearing and visual impairment and learning disabilities, young people and senior citizens.

Council has also considered feedback on this key service gathered in the course of its audience engagement activities throughout the year. In particular, Council's consultation with schoolchildren in Autumn 2007 provided rich feedback on the value of bbc.co.uk and its educational content.

## **C. Consultation Questions**

The Audience Council's responses to consultation questions are informed by active engagement with a diverse representation of the audience about this service review, ongoing feedback on BBC services and audience need, and Council's own deliberations informed by research and briefings.

### **Q1a. To what extent does [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) serve the BBC's Public Purposes and, in particular, the citizenship and educational purposes?**

**Citizenship:** Council believes that [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) serves the Citizenship Purpose very well. The feedback it has received from audiences suggests that news coverage online is respected for its breadth, high quality and impartiality. Users generally placed a high level of trust in news online services. The News site, along with sport and weather, was one of the main draws to [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) for a diverse range of users.

Council also notes the important role which [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) plays in encouraging audiences to debate topical issues through mechanisms such as blogs and message boards.

Council particularly notes the value that the local audience places on the BBC Northern Ireland news online site. It commends developments to this site such as an increase in embedded audio and visual content including a BBC Newline 2 minute bulletin. It notes the value added by comprehensive coverage of the Northern Ireland Assembly Elections through impartial news coverage and analysis and welcomed developments such as the Political Editor's blog and an innovative text results service.

Council has identified media literacy and digital inclusion as significant themes in its engagement with local audiences on the [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) service review. It notes that some of the sections of the audience which accessed the service least had the potential to gain significant value from it.

Feedback from a group of senior citizens revealed concerns that [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) was not accessible to some older people. There was significant interest and surprise at the range of services available on [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) but disappointment that there was no easy way in for people with lower levels of experience and confidence with this platform, or difficulties in setting up equipment. There was particular interest in accessing social information and advice on relevant topics such as benefits. Council noted that the [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) website can be particularly intimidating because its size and complexity can make it difficult for new users to navigate to material that is relevant to them.

Similarly Council received feedback from a group of people with hearing impairment which evidenced low awareness and take up of the service. Collaboration with existing websites and content providers servicing this community would raise awareness and help link into the rich [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) content that could be exploited and enjoyed.

Council welcomes the efforts made to help different sections on the audience engage with the service, for instance through the BBC NI Community Bus and through well received courses run in conjunction with Help The Aged. It believes that there should be even further emphasis on this type of activity and that the BBC should work closely in partnership with other organisations to achieve this. Particular consideration should be given to ways to engage with underserved sections of the audience. Council

gathered specific suggestions from the audience such as more subtitled content on the iPlayer and links from websites most heavily used by these sections of the audience.

## **Education:**

Council considers that [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) has a critical role to play in delivering the BBC's educational purposes. The online platform offers functionality that particularly supports learning needs through a mix of media, interactivity, personalisation and links to other material.

Major sites such as Bitesize and Onion Street are pivotal in supporting the schools' curriculum with high quality, trusted and free content. Council notes important feedback from its Schools Consultation with 700 11 – 14 year olds which indicated that there was a greater need for promotion of learning sites within schools. For instance, the majority of pupils involved had not heard of Onion Street and were unaware of what it offered by way of learning through networking. There was enthusiasm among pupils for Bitesize but feedback also suggested that more needed to be done to reflect the interests and needs of this age group by covering more of their curriculum in an interactive and fun way that would engage their interest.

Council believes that the online content in support of the local curriculum and learning needs is a rich and essential part of the service. It commends the range and creativity of the local content produced. It agrees with feedback from educational interests that a distinctive enhancement would make content available in a format which young people can edit and manipulate to produce their own content, thus stimulating their creativity and user generated content skills development rather than always relying on pre-packaged programming and clips.

Council notes the importance of [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) in providing a free and relevant service to support formal education. It acknowledges significant disappointment in the suspension of BBC Jam which it considered provided significant public value. Some stakeholders had been actively involved as advisors in the development of the service and therefore were disappointed that investment both inside and outside the BBC may be lost.

Council is aware that [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) educational content should be innovative and distinctive within the marketplace and not cause undue detriment to the commercial sector. It has expressed strong interest in the BBC's Learning Strategy post BBC Jam. In particular, it has emphasised its concern that the investment in BBC Jam should not be lost, particularly with regard to modules in Irish where there does not appear to be commercial impact.

Council is pleased that the service supports informal as well as formal learning opportunities and that these are well integrated with other content to reach a wide and diverse audience. For instance, learning content on [bbc.co.uk/ni](http://bbc.co.uk/ni) reflects a wide range of interests including creative writing, literacy skills, history, Irish language, Ulster-Scots and environment and leisure activities.

Council has recently completed a two stage consultation into BBC provision for Irish and Ulster-Scots languages in which it noted a significant appetite for more online provision, particularly in support of learners and potential learners. Council wishes to see further development of the BBC Northern Ireland website to reflect this demand in creative ways.

**Reflecting Nations, Regions and Communities:** Council notes that BBC Trust research<sup>1</sup> indicates that audiences in Northern Ireland place particular importance on reflecting local communities, and yet believe that this is an area where the BBC could perform better. It believes that [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) has a core role to play in this Public Purpose.

[bbc.co.uk/ni](http://bbc.co.uk/ni) provides a wealth of local news sport, weather and other valuable local information to very substantial audiences across Northern Ireland. It encourages debate and interactivity through a variety of mechanisms including local blogs, Talk NI message boards and access to programmes through their websites.

The [bbc.co.uk/ni](http://bbc.co.uk/ni) Communities websites are of particular value in reflecting and capturing the diversity of local communities. Websites such as Your Place and Mine and Days Like This offer opportunities for users to share their own stories with a more diverse audience, facilitating connections between different communities and generations. The Storyfinders website works with local communities over a sustained period to generate their own content and is an example of an innovative partnership with other organisations. Council is mindful that Communities websites are the natural 'way in' to digital media for some members of the audience.

Council notes with interest the suggestion that the service should make more use of content from external voluntary sector sites where this is appropriate and serves the Public Purposes.

Council is pleased to acknowledge other [bbc.co.uk/ni](http://bbc.co.uk/ni) initiatives which bring people together for shared experiences. For instance, the Milk Cup website reflected the sporting, international and community aspects of this key event.

**Stimulating Culture and Creativity:** Council notes the contribution which [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) makes to this Public Purpose. Entertainment and music sites are key. Opportunities to download music are important to growing sections of the audience, particularly young people.

**Bringing the World to the UK and the UK to the World:** Council notes the particular opportunities which [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) provides for users to access content at local, national and international level. For instance, users in Northern Ireland can access or download content from the Asian network and World service which reflects their interests and cultural background. Council also notes the high proportion of users outside the UK and underlines the significant opportunity this brings for the UK, its nations, regions and communities to promote and explain contemporary culture, history and arts to the rest of the world.

**Emerging Communications:** Council notes the role that [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) plays in supporting this Public Purpose by supporting innovative technology, changing patterns of consumption and working with other organisations to end the 'digital divide'. Council is very mindful of the 'digital divide' in Northern Ireland and supportive of ways to encourage digital inclusion and media literacy. [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) has a particular role to play, in partnership with work by other organisations, by helping to explain new

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<sup>1</sup> BBC Purpose Remit Consultation :

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/consult/purpose\\_remits/responses/audience\\_research.pdf](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/consult/purpose_remits/responses/audience_research.pdf)

technology as a trusted guide for users and to showcase the benefits through distinctive content.

**Q1b. To what extent is bbc.co.uk distinctive and innovative?  
Does it display the other content characteristics set out for it?**

Most users consulted felt that the service was distinctive. Council notes that the audience tended to base its assessment on content alone or on content supported by creative use of technology and not simply technology for its own sake. For instance, several consultees singled out A Titanic Journey on BBC NI's Learning site as an example of innovation and distinctiveness.

Stakeholders in particular noted the costs and risks associated with being a market leader in such a fast changing industry. Council agrees that the BBC's role should be to keep pace with developments in technology but not usually to play the role of market leader in technology where this could compromise value for money for audiences.

Council notes the challenges associated with connecting with a diverse user group with a wide range of interests and needs supported by different technology and levels of expertise in exploring the internet. It believes that bbc.co.uk needs to offer something to everyone and to reflect the BBC's Public Purposes to a wide user group. Council observes that this should be demonstrated in a rich variety of content aimed at different interests, levels of expertise in using the website and different levels of technology. The site must not super serve those with cutting edge technology, not should it always be restricted to the lowest common denominator in terms of equipment and literacy.

Council is pleased that bbc.co.uk has generally kept pace with the broadcasting marketplace in the use of blogs and message boards. It notes the popularity of podcasts such as Ulster's Funny Stuff, a compilation of comic moments from the week's Radio Ulster schedules. Council wishes to be assured that the service's infrastructure is being developed to enable more extensive use of podcasts and other new forms of content in the future.

It is noticeable that the BBC has been mindful of audience safety online and avoided hard to moderate live chat rooms in favour of pre and post or self-moderated message boards.

Council believes that the BBC should continue to innovate with how the internet is used, looking outside its own domain to harness existing applications such as YouTube, Flickr and Facebook to collate audience content without having to replicate these capabilities internally. The BBC should continue to recognise that the online world is an increasingly personalised experience with users expecting to be able to tune portal pages to suit their interests, all the while being allowed and encouraged to stumble upon new content that they have previously not visited.

Council acknowledges that rights issues are important in the development of online services. It is, however, important that bbc.co.uk is able to reflect trends in the way media is consumed. Council notes the growing minority of users who wish to manipulate BBC and other content and create their own content with it. As well as the archive trial, Council acknowledges that the BBC does upload a small number of clips of popular television shows to YouTube each day. It will be important to

continue to develop this capacity by considering how to make content more easily and legally available for users to manipulate. The BBC should also consider how to harness and showcase this creativity on its own website as appropriate.

Council notes that the current Radio Player and associated Listen Again service has been hit by reliability problems during 2007. The migration of Radio Player into the main iPlayer service needs to be carefully managed and explained to the wide range of users. In particular, the BBC must continue to support the streaming of live and catch-up radio to users without the need to download specific software (such as the full iPlayer application). For many users on the move and using borrowed or guest computers, or in schools with locked down installations, they can only rely on the most basic of software being available (eg, Flash, RealPlayer, WMP). As iPlayer moves into a new phase of active promotion it is essential that promised usability features such as series stacking are finally implemented and released to the public.

Whilst the overall bbc.co.uk website infrastructure is extremely reliable, some of the trial and newly launched services have been less robust and scalable than the traditional broadcast platforms. The BBC's blogging platform has enjoyed significant success and growth, yet the audience's ability to engage and post comments has been regularly hit by performance problems throughout 2007 due to the impact of automated spam commenting. The podcast service has been successful and appreciated by a growing audience, yet many shows - national and local, popular and niche - have been unable to secure slots on the podcasting platform to further promulgate their valuable content to the available audience.

Council feel that more care needs to be taken in a world of perpetual betas to make trial services scalable and robust enough to survive in a world where trials become live services and cannot be interrupted without adverse audience reaction and a withdrawal of value.

### **Q1c. To what extent does bbc.co.uk reflect and extend the range of the BBC's broadcast services?**

Council believes that bbc.co.uk plays a significant role in reflecting and extending the range of the BBC's broadcast services. For instance, it notes the increased use of audio visual content on the website to enhance what is available on broadcast services, for instance with different durations and formats. In the digital world the value of content, once gathered, can be maximised by use in different ways across different platforms.

Council observed the high value placed by many users on audio visual content and, in particular the Listen Again service. Audiences observed that this service was perhaps inappropriately titled as most users availed of it to listen to programmes at a more convenient time rather than to listen again. There was also considerable interest in the iPlayer service.

There was some concern among the senior citizens consulted that the website would reflect an overall lack of programmes of interest to this age group. However, it was also acknowledged that, due to a lack of confidence in accessing the site, there was not a full appreciation of what was available. Council would add that, while bbc.co.uk should extend and enhance the range of the BBC's broadcast services, it need not be

to a structure of programme sites and should continue to develop content specifically for the website where appropriate.

Council members have witnessed a strong appreciation for [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) from young teens, particularly focussed around games, *EastEnders*, sport and popular shows like *Top Gear*. Young children enjoy the availability of additional stories, songs and activities on the CBeebies website. This builds significant brand loyalty and appreciation for the value of the BBC. The availability of play lists for radio shows, and references to source CDs for more obscure recordings played on Radio 3 are appreciated.

Council believes that it is vital that [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) keeps apace with the demands and consumer patterns of these young age groups in order to provide them with value through BBC content which they might otherwise not engage with through other platforms.

### **Q1d. Does [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) enable users to navigate and search easily and does it lead its users effectively beyond BBC content?**

Council observed that ease of navigation is very highly valued by the audience.

The vast majority of respondents to the Audience Council's questionnaire, who were by definition users of the BBC website, found [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) easy to navigate, particularly in the context of the huge amount of material available. Most simply replied in the affirmative to a question about ease of access and a few were particularly appreciative:

- "very clear, hard to get lost"
- "yes, very much so"
- "very easy to navigate"
- "yes, and the A – Z index is very well sorted"
- "yes, it is well laid out"

In some cases there were favourable comparisons with other web sites, particularly those that were felt to be cluttered with advertising:

- "I always come back for neat clean content"

A few members of the audience were more critical, commenting that navigation was simple if the user knew the general site structure (eg to navigate to news or weather) but was less reliable in complex string searches. A small number of others found the side navigation bars less helpful, and wondered if they really reflected the most popular sites. One person felt that the BBC NI and BBC Scotland websites were easier to navigate than the main BBC home page.

A relatively small proportion of people consulted preferred to use the Google search engine, even when accessing BBC content. The ability to bypass navigation and jump to content is a necessity for modern websites. Recently announced innovations such as a permanent URL for every programme are welcomed as they assist the growing number of people who will launch directly into [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) content from the results page of a search engine.

Council believes that an excellent search engine which is as good as the main commercial alternatives is key to helping audiences to derive full value from the public

investment in such a broad range of content, and to fulfil the objective of helping users to navigate the world wide web generally.

Whilst overall the site was considered as a benchmark in reliability there have also been frustrations with the reliability of Listen Again and blog commenting services, the provision of usability functions for iPlayer and issues with updating content such as sports results.

There were variations in the extent to which users of bbc.co.uk used the site as a way into non-BBC content. A considerable proportion made no or occasional use of this opportunity. For those with an interest there was generally very positive feedback with the BBC often perceived as a trusted guide. There was particular praise for the links to external sites which some users considered particularly well researched and selected:

- “it leads you to the best site for what you are looking for, not like other sites that send you on a wild goose chase”
- “I am beginning to use this site as a springboard”
- “the search engine is useful”
- “I often use external links from the news and life sections”
- “it is the best I’ve found”
- “the links are well researched”
- “it is an excellent stimulus”
- “you don’t have to create all content for yourselves. The most useful thing is an indication of what external content is the most practical/honest/balanced”

Council observed some sense that ease of navigation and useful leads into the wider online content were perceived as supporting the BBC’s wider values of trust, safety and value to the audience.

Council also noted that there were sections of the audience, such as some senior citizens, who had difficulty accessing and using bbc.co.uk and required further support. For these people, navigation was not practical without additional assistance, and there was consequently a low level of awareness of what the site offered. Council believes that it is imperative that these groups, who potentially have much to gain from the service, are properly supported to derive benefits from the resource.

Council was delighted to hear from consultees that bbc.co.uk is distinguished as being highly accessible to people with visual impairments. Practically all images have useful textual descriptions (ALT tags). Specific comments were made about bbc.co.uk’s support for people with visual impairments which goes beyond simple browser-based increased text size support, with the text only links appearing on the vast majority of webpages. Particular approval was given for the (Betsie) facility to vary text size coupled with a choice of different contrasting foreground/background colours to best suit user’s legibility needs.

Council also notes that a wide variety of different audio and visual formats are used across the website. This inconsistency can be confusing and unhelpful to all but the most technically literate users. Council urges the BBC to adopt consistent standards

and, where possible, to use open standards across [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) to maximise the availability of content to audiences on as wide a variety of fixed and mobile computing devices as possible.

### **Q1e. Does [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) make the BBC more accountable to licence fee payers?**

Council notes that [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) is primarily of value to audiences as a platform for content.

Nonetheless, it does, to some extent, promote accountability to audiences through feedback and complaints mechanisms. Council observes the opportunities for programme makers and managers to engage directly with their audiences to explain decisions and to ask for feedback. The Editors' Blogs for news, sport and online are particularly commendable in responding to key audience themes with open and accessible responses. Council also notes examples where user responses have been used for programme content – for instance some contributors to the Will and Testament website have appeared as contributors on Radio Ulster's Sunday Sequence.

However, Council also acknowledges feedback which indicates that audiences often do not know what mechanisms are available for feedback and dialogue, and where they do try to access them can find the processes inconsistent and difficult to navigate. Council would like [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) to simplify and clarify its feedback offer to the audience. Such an offer should incorporate the use of blogs, message boards and other ways to facilitate communication on a one to many basis, where this is appropriate. It is vital that dialogue with audiences is meaningful and genuinely feeds back into the development of the service.

Council notes the availability of a simple and clear complaints process on the website. It believes, based on audience feedback, that awareness of this facility could be raised. Nonetheless, when users do access it they have the benefit of a clearer offer and process than other feedback mechanisms.

Council observes that there can be a tendency for BBC bloggers to stay above the comment line by posting articles but not becoming involved in the debate. It suggests that dialogue between the BBC and its audience would sometimes be better served by BBC bloggers becoming more involved in the debate.

### **Q1f. As far as you are aware, does [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) comply with the other requirements set out for it as key characteristics?**

Overall consultees expressed the view that [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) provided a comprehensive and reliable service. It is considered by some to be a benchmark of reliability.

### **Q2. Does the Service Licence provide an effective basis for the Trust to hold [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) to account?**

Council agrees that, as a major BBC service, [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) should have its own service licence. It recommends that the service licence contains includes annexes for Nations services, just as the service licences for BBC ONE and BBC TWO do. The local [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) websites greatly enhance the value of the site as a whole for many users and

there should be a means to ensure that this is reflected in investment and accountability.

Council observes that service licences are relatively new tools for holding the BBC to account. It will be clearer over time how effective this tool is for a service which must develop rapidly with changes in technology and the marketplace.

In engaging with audiences it became apparent that there was a low level of awareness that [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) is paid for by the licence fee. However, once this was known, consultees showed a high level of appreciation for the service as part of what they receive for their licence fee. If anything it was felt that the high and growing reach of [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) might merit a greater proportion of licence fee funds over time. Council notes that technology is changing at a fast pace and that there needs to be a strong structure in place to enable the BBC to respond effectively and promptly to the changes.

Council also notes the high level of usage of licence fee funded services by non-licence fee payers resident outside the UK. This reflects the reality of the 'world wide web', serves the Purpose of representing the UK to the World and the World to the UK, and may offer opportunities to broaden user generated content. Nonetheless, Council emphasises that the best value for money must be provided for licence fee payers and that the service should be clearly focused on their needs.

### **Q3. Should the Service Licence for [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) be developed over time or changed in order to reflect changes to its users' needs and the online market?**

Council believes that it is vital that the Service Licence has the flexibility to reflect changes in this fast-paced industry.

It will be important for the Service Licence to take into account any impact from new services such as iPlayer and the proposed service, My Local Now.

It will equally be important to ensure that this flexibility does not reduce BBC accountability for investment decisions and, in particular, in demonstrating value for money.



### **Service Review of [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk)**

#### **Response from Audience Council for Scotland**

##### **1. Introduction**

The BBC Trust is embarking on service reviews of all the Service Licences which form the accountability framework for BBC Services. This first service review is addressing how the Service Licence for [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) reflects the service and holds it to account, and also considers the developing role and purpose of [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) as a service.

This is the first service review being run by the Trust and this response from the Audience Council for Scotland (ACS) has been undertaken in the context of evidence received from licence fee payers in Scotland.

##### **2. Methodology**

The Council undertook an online consultation via [bbc.co.uk/scotland](http://bbc.co.uk/scotland) and a focus group consultation in connection with the review. The online consultation was designed to complement the Trust's own consultation but focussed more on the use and potential of the site than on the service licence. A copy of the questions is contained in Appendix 1. The focus group work covered the same questions but explored the issues which arose in group debate. The Council reviewed the evidence from the audience consultations before considering the key questions around the Service Licence and Public Purposes.

##### **3. Comments from users**

###### **3.1 Focus group**

Focus group comment centred on the news and educational elements of [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk). Attendees praised the clear structuring of the news site, from world to local news, and the frequent updating of material. The site was helpful in informing licence payers about important political and social issues. In addition, the revision website Bitesize was particularly valued.

Generally, attendees found [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) distinctive and easy to follow. Other strengths were ease of navigation and good links. However few members of the group used [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) as their homepage.

It was commented that the site received no marketing effort or publicity beyond the signposting at the end of radio and television programmes.

A number reported problems with use of video on the internet. Attendees felt that, compared with other services such as Sky, the interactive service was slow, and that there was a relatively small amount of content. It was suggested that BBC Three

content should be available on internet as their target audience spend a good deal of time on the net.

### **3.2 bbc.co.uk/scotland consultation**

19 submissions were received from users who claimed to visit the site every day, or more frequently. Responses to the BBC Scotland consultation are summarised around three key qualitative questions.

#### **‘Do you access /Scotland and if so why?’**

Strengths were seen as its ‘definitive news coverage’, wide range of subject matter for educational and research purposes, and ease of use. A number of respondents came to the site for sport. Other features mentioned were Island Blogging and the resources on history.

Users of the /scotland pages were drawn to the site by local news and sport, programme sites and information and blog written by the BBC Scotland political editor Brian Taylor.

#### **‘How should /Scotland develop?’**

Priorities for development of the site included:

Offer more archive material (via iPlayer)

Carry transcripts of programmes

Offer more detailed coverage of Scottish affairs, including more video from the Scottish Parliament

Offer more Scottish programming generally

One respondent suggested there should be a section on the UK Parliament and how its decisions and debates may impact on Scotland. There were some detailed comments on the Island Blogging site which have been passed to BBC Scotland.

#### **‘How does bbc.co.uk differ from other sites you use?’**

bbc.co.uk complements BBC content rather than competes with it

News is accurate, objective, wide-ranging and up-to-date

‘Content king of the world’ – a ‘mini version of the internet’ – ‘so many interesting avenues to explore’

Material is well-written

Information is reliable

One respondent found the site ‘boring’ to look at

Council will use the insights gained from this exercise in its ongoing work with BBC Scotland.

## **4. Audience Council Scotland comments**

### **4.1 Sustaining citizenship and civil society**

The audience feedback from the focus groups and the online discussion suggested to members that the service contributes most strongly to this BBC public purpose, meeting the remit to:

Engage people with democratic processes and political debate

Stimulate interest and involvement in discussion in current affairs, local and global issues

Provide a comprehensive and impartial platform for information, education and debate

However Council noted that respondents did not appear to consider the site as a forum for active participation and debate.

### **4.2 Participation**

Members also noted issues around accessibility which impacted on the delivery of this public purpose. In taking forward the commitment to this public purpose the service licence currently states:

*“bbc.co.uk should encourage internet adoption, including through digital media literacy projects, thereby making a substantial contribution towards a digital UK. It should support new users with advice and aim to increase their confidence, particularly helping those audiences who risk being stranded on the wrong side of the digital divide. It should foster a ‘learning curve’ of interactive engagement, encouraging audiences to move from passive consumption to active participation online. “*

This ambition is expanded on in commitments made by the BBC following the Graf review in 2004 in relation to raising levels of media literacy, the role of bbc.co.uk in the contribution to a 100% digital UK, the commitment of the BBC in encouraging broadband to be more affordable and accessible, and supporting those on the wrong side of the digital divide.

The Council feels there is scope to increase the BBC’s role in the area, particularly in the view of the success of the Island Blogging initiative.

The Council recognises that the BBC is not the main driver of improved broadband coverage. However the service licence could be more reflective of this as the current licence suggests a greater responsibility and accountability than the BBC can realistically deliver.

### **4.3 Digital divide**

Annex II of the service licence also states that through bbc.co.uk, the BBC is *‘particularly focussed on those who risk being stranded on the wrong side of the digital divide’*. It is unclear how bbc.co.uk is active in meeting this and the contribution of the BBC to a 100% digital UK.

#### **4.4 Bringing the UK to world and the world to UK**

The world wide accessibility (and usage) of the site was one of the features of the service which was noted in the consultation responses. This was seen as beneficial in providing a portal to the UK from abroad, and in promoting the UK worldwide.

#### **4.5 BBC Jam**

The suspension of BBC Jam was raised during the consultation and strong representations had been made to the Council on the issue. [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) was highlighted as an umbrella service of which BBC Jam was seen as being a valued aspect. The Council regrets in particular the suspension of the BBC Jam Gaelic resources which, until their removal, had made an enormous contribution to the range of Gaelic educational resources available on the web. The Council feels that the restoration of this kind of resource as part of the proposed Gaelic Digital Service should be a priority for the Trust.

#### **4.6 Performance against the terms of the service licence**

The service is meeting most of the aspects expected of it in the Service Licence. However it was felt that the licence was written in terms too broad to represent the nature and complexity of the service. Greater specificity would make it easier to use the SL in performance monitoring.

The licence should also reflect the fact that the service is not only a service in its own right, but an umbrella for other key services, such as iPlayer.

#### **4.7 Indigenous Minority Languages**

The service licence makes no reference to indigenous language provision. However [bbc.co.uk/alba](http://bbc.co.uk/alba) plays an important role in delivering this. The Draft Service Licence for the GDS covers only the television output of that service. The Council feels that assessment of /alba against its stated aims as part of the GDS would be more easily managed, and more effective, if /alba were to be included within the GDS service licence.

#### **4.8 Comments on responses from Scotland to the Trust consultation**

Respondents from Scotland to the Trust consultation were generally very positive about the site's informational and educational aspects. A number of respondents did not consider the site to be particularly innovative, and there were questions about the commitment to user generated content and the encouragement of extent of user participation; there was some demand for greater access to archived material. A majority agreed that the service met the requirements set out for it as key characteristics. Some were critical of the site's reliance on Microsoft based platforms. There were mixed views on whether the site made the BBC more accountable to licence payers.

One respondent commented that there appeared to be a bias towards the English and Welsh education systems, with not enough awareness that Scotland follows a separate and distinct education system.

## 4.9 Concluding Recommendations

The licence makes no specific requirements of [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) for audiences in the UK nations. ACS recommends detailed licences for the national services to allow for more effective oversight of services in the nations.

The commitments of the service licence to the delivery of each public purpose, and the Graf recommendations, should be more clearly presented in the main body of the document, not within Annexes.

The consultation indicated that there was an appetite for more material in all genres on [bbc.co.uk/Scotland](http://bbc.co.uk/Scotland).

The Trust should consider setting performance measures for [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk)'s remit to encourage participation in debate.

The Trust should ensure that the SL appropriately describes the BBC's role in overcoming the digital divide, promoting media literacy and promoting broadband uptake.

Consideration should be given as to how the Service Licence can encompass services which depend on [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) e.g. iPlayer.

BBC Jam Gaelic resources or equivalent should be restored as part of the proposed Gaelic Digital Service.

Assessment of /alba against its stated aims as part of the GDS would be more easily managed, and more effective, if /alba were to be included within the GDS service licence.

The Trust should reconsider the cycle of service reviews to ensure they keep pace with rapidly developing services such as [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk).

### Submission to the BBC Trust [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) service review consultation

#### Context

The Audience Council for Wales is strongly of the opinion that [bbc.co.uk/cymru](http://bbc.co.uk/cymru) and [bbc.co.uk/wales](http://bbc.co.uk/wales) fulfil a vital civic role in Wales – and each does so in a distinctive different way. With no national newspapers in Wales (the Western Mail sells mainly in south Wales while the Daily Post sells in north Wales) and the highest selling newspaper being The Sun, with no correspondent based in Wales, BBC Cymru Wales fulfils a vital function in informing the population of Wales about issues and events which matter to them. This is essential in post-devolution Wales and particularly so since the implementation of the 2006 Government of Wales Act which gave the National Assembly for Wales de facto primary law making powers. As recent independent research conducted by BBC Cymru Wales demonstrated, the information provided by BBC Cymru Wales, including the services accessed through [bbc.co.uk/cymru](http://bbc.co.uk/cymru) and [bbc.co.uk/wales](http://bbc.co.uk/wales), were pivotal in informing a majority of voters about issues and policies in the period leading to the elections to the National Assembly for Wales in May 2007.

The Audience Council for Wales considers that [bbc.co.uk/cymru](http://bbc.co.uk/cymru) and [bbc.co.uk/wales](http://bbc.co.uk/wales) also fulfil a vital function in the sphere of education and learning. In the context of formal education the Council is very aware of the value placed on services such as the eclips service by teachers (see also page 26). This enables teachers – in addition to the [bbc.co.uk/cymru/addysg](http://bbc.co.uk/cymru/addysg) and [bbc.co.uk/wales/education](http://bbc.co.uk/wales/education) provision – to download and use clips of video and audio in both Welsh and English that are relevant to the Wales curriculum to enrich their lessons in subject areas such as history, geography, science, religious education, sociology and travel and tourism. The Council considers too that in the sphere of informal learning [bbc.co.uk/cymru](http://bbc.co.uk/cymru) and [bbc.co.uk/wales](http://bbc.co.uk/wales) also fulfil an important role, identifying in particular the contribution they make to the learning of Welsh as a second language through such multi-media resources as The Big Welsh Challenge, Colin and Cumberland and Catchphrase. Council gave particular praise to the Vocab/Geirfa tool on the [bbc.co.uk/cymru](http://bbc.co.uk/cymru) site that allows those learning Welsh to browse the site and view simultaneous translations of selected words – a BBC Cymru Wales development which has now been made available as an ‘open source’ resource for use by other Welsh language web-sites and now promoted by the Welsh Language Board. It has also been adapted to translate English words into Somali (see also page 26).

Council also commended the increased emphasis within the [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) service on promoting creativity and extending the BBC’s broadcast provision through encouraging user generated content both in the context of developing the web-based community h2g2 and also through such vehicles as the BBC Cymru Wales multi-platform Coal House project which saw a significant number of individuals contributing their

recollections and stories of twentieth century coal mining communities to the project's website (see also page 26).

A key recommendation of the Audience Council for Wales, to facilitate the process of holding the BBC accountable for the Nations' online services, is that the *bbc.co.uk* Service Licence should have appendices covering the Nations' services as do the BBC One and BBC Two Service Licences. In addition, as the Rosenblatt research demonstrated, awareness of the *bbc.co.uk/cymru* and *bbc.co.uk/wales* sites was limited, but once users became aware of them they were astonished at the breadth and quality of the provision available. Council recommends therefore that these distinct services should each have a higher profile within the wider *bbc.co.uk* site – and suggest that the 2008 first quarter re-launch of the *bbc.co.uk* front page might provide an opportunity to facilitate this.

The Council's second main recommendation is that the Service Licence should be drafted in such a way as to minimise the constraints on future developments since the pace of developments seems to be continually accelerating.

## **General comments**

The Audience Council for Wales (ACW) considers that *bbc.co.uk* is performing well against the commitments in its Service Licence. This view is based on its consideration of the draft *bbc.co.uk* Service Licence earlier this year; the final Annual Performance Review of the Educational Broadcasting Council for Wales for the year 2006-2007; the Council's audience engagement activity; and independent audience usage and attitude research on the BBC's online services conducted on behalf of the BBC Broadcasting Council for Wales in 2006 by Rosenblatt<sup>2</sup>.

The Rosenblatt research focused in particular on *bbc.co.uk/cymru* and *bbc.co.uk/wales* and demonstrated the importance placed by audiences, and their appreciation of, the distinctiveness of the */cymru* and */wales* services – describing them, to quote users interviewed as part of the research project, as the 'gold standard', "offering unparalleled depth and breadth of content". The Council concurs with these conclusions and applauds the very distinct nature of each of these two services. That *bbc.co.uk/cymru* and *bbc.co.uk/wales* were two separate and distinctive services, rather than versions in a different language of the same service, was considered by Council to be essential and valued greatly by the services' audiences.

## **1. How does *bbc.co.uk* currently perform against the commitments made in its Service Licence?**

The Audience Council for Wales considers that *bbc.co.uk* is, on the whole, performing well against the commitments in its Service Licence.

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<sup>2</sup> *BBC Cymru Wales Online Services, Usage & Attitude Research*. Prepared for the Broadcasting Council for Wales, February 2006 by Rosenblatt.

### **1a. To what extent does [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) serve the BBC's public purposes and, in particular, the citizenship and educational purposes?**

The Council considers that *bbc.co.uk* serves the BBC's Public Purposes well, in particular the citizenship and educational Purposes. Research commissioned by the Broadcasting Council, demonstrated that on-line users consider that the BBC news websites at both national, UK-wide and international level "*led most people's ideal of what a great news site should be – immediate, accurate and easy to get around*", with reporting seen as "*fair and objective and where the BBC brand values of trust and professionalism worked hardest*". Furthermore, at both local, UK-wide and international level "*the three BBC websites compared favourably with the perceived flashy commerciality of Sky online, with the perceived American, male, brash and militaristic CNN and with the national (UK-wide) newspaper websites.*"

The Council considers that on the whole, *bbc.co.uk* fulfils its educational purposes satisfactorily, both in formal and informal education. The ACW has already expressed its strong concern about the impact of the Trust's decision to suspend BBC Jam on learners in Wales, where there is no significant commercial provision of learning materials relevant to the curriculum, especially in the Welsh language. The Council has warmly welcomed the *e-clips* online resource which enables teachers to access material for enlivening the classroom experience of pupils by providing rich media content.

The Council also commends the multi-media material on *bbc.co.uk/cymru* and *bbc.co.uk/wales* to enable people to learn Welsh (such as *Colin and Cumberland* and *The Big Welsh Challenge*) and to support their acquisition of the language through such innovations as the BBC Vocab/Geirfa tool.

The research demonstrates that while the BBC was "*highly rated and trusted for its provision of children's content*" there was a call across the sample "*for more interest related content – music, photography, etc.*" i.e. more material for informal educational purposes. The Council acknowledged also the striking recent success of the multi-platform project, *Coal House*, which saw members of the public contributing their own recollections and stories of coal mining communities to the *Coal House* website and which will remain as a significant historical resource and a worthwhile informal and formal educational resource.

### **1b - To what extent is [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) distinctive and innovative? Does it display the other content characteristics set out for it?**

The ACW considers *bbc.co.uk* to be both distinctive and innovative. In the Rosenblatt research, respondents considered that *bbc.co.uk* offered "*unparalleled depth and breadth of content*" which had in turn resulted in "*loyalty and word of mouth recommendations [being] high*". The ACW also recognises and commends the on-line innovations in such projects as BBC Cymru Wales' *Colin and Cumberland* language learning website, the introduction of the *Vocab/Geirfa* facility on *bbc.co.uk/cymru* (which enables those learning Welsh to choose to see the English translations of words on the Welsh language web-site), the *My Science Fiction Life* website which subsequently transferred to television and the innovation represented by the production of short 'tardisodes' downloadable from the *Doctor Who* website and viewable on mobile phones.

### **Ic - To what extent does [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) reflect and extend the range of the BBC's broadcast services?**

The ACW considers that [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) successfully reflects and extends the range of BBC's broadcast services through the provision of additional material as well as by providing navigational links to further resources and information. The ACW considered sites such as the Radio Cymru C2 site and the *Doctor Who ComicMaker*. Sarah Jane Adventures and [bbc.co.uk/wales/wildaboutnature](http://bbc.co.uk/wales/wildaboutnature) as good examples in the [bbc.co.uk/cymru](http://bbc.co.uk/cymru) and [bbc.co.uk/wales](http://bbc.co.uk/wales), with radio and television provision being extended to an interactive rather than a purely factual website.

The period since the last review of [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) has also seen a far greater emphasis on multi-platform provision, with audio and video material now routinely accessible through [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) web-pages. The Council warmly welcomes these development and considers that the availability of video material on the web-site – occasionally before being made available by any other means (such as recently, when the Welsh Rugby Union coach was dismissed from post, and video material from the press conference announcing this development was on the BBC Cymru Wales Sports website within 30 minutes of the end of the press conference) – is a key element of what makes the [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) provision distinctive and innovative.

As noted in its submission to the Trust's iPlayer Public Value Test consultation, the ACW welcomes the introduction of an on-demand service and would similarly welcome the making of some of the BBC's content archives accessible online.

### **Id – Does [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) enable users to navigate and search easily and does it lead its users effectively beyond BBC content?**

Yes, ACW members consider that on the whole, [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) enables users to navigate and search easily and leads users effectively beyond BBC content. In the recent Council commissioned research, a key finding was that the “*internet's scale created excitement*” but that this scale “*did also encourage habitualised behaviour as respondents sought to limit the time taken to search and to avoid content that was distasteful to them.*” Against this background, the [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) websites were considered very good in terms of ease of use, although amongst the sample, “*younger and middle aged men called for a better search facility on the BBC's sites.*” To address this, Council considered that the [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) Service Licence should place a greater emphasis on the importance of ‘tagging’ material on the BBC's web provision since this would greatly facilitate links with external websites.

Council in particular welcomed the development of the [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) interactive community and social networking h2g2 service which allows users to create and add and share their own content on the website.

### **Ie - Does [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) make the BBC more accountable to licence fee payers?**

The ACW considered that [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) makes the BBC more accountable to licence fee payers in several important respects, such as the introduction of discussion forums, blogs by key news correspondents, the ability for listeners and viewers to respond and contribute to programmes electronically by email and not least by the introduction of the BBC Trust and Audience Council web-sites. The ACW articulated the danger, for

broadcast and on-line services alike, that ‘interactivity’ of this kind can descend into a facile and superficial exercise rather than a meaningful dialogue while at the same time risking devaluing the useful and essential role of holding the BBC to account in its role of public service broadcaster.

**If - As far as you are aware, does *bbc.co.uk* comply with the other requirements set out for it as key characteristics?**

Yes, the ACW, to the extent it was aware, considered that *bbc.co.uk* does comply with the other requirements set out for it as key characteristics, welcoming for example the expansion of services to encompass mobile phones and other mobile devices, the expansion of the number of available PodCasts as well as the increasing availability of video and audio material on-line – something which sections of the sample questioned for the 2006 Rosenblatt research highlighted as a particular aspiration.

**Ig - How does *bbc.co.uk* perform against any other commitments included in its Service Licence, other than those already addressed?**

The ACW considers that *bbc.co.uk* had contributed significantly to purpose of stimulating creativity through such projects as *Digital Storytelling* and *Capture Wales*. The Council also considered that *bbc.co.uk* contributed to the BBC Purpose of Reflecting the UK’s Nations, Regions and Communities highlighting in particular in this context, the pivotal role which *bbc.co.uk/cymru* and *bbc.co.uk/wales* had played in articulating the debates and results surrounding the 2007 National Assembly elections. Council also welcomed and valued the ‘Lleol i mi’ / ‘Where I live’ sections of the *bbc.co.uk/cymru* and *bbc.co.uk/wales* web-sites considering that they contributed significantly and positively to community cohesion and identity. At the Council’s accountability events these local sites are frequently referred to as services which audiences value greatly.

**2. Does the Service Licence provide an effective basis for the Trust to hold *bbc.co.uk* to account?**

To provide an effective basis for holding the BBC accountable for the Nations’ online services the *bbc.co.uk* Service Licence should have appendices covering the Nations’ services, as do the BBC One and BBC Two Service Licences.

With this addition the ACW considers that the Service Licence provides an effective basis for the Trust to hold *bbc.co.uk* to account.

Council was keen that any changes that are made to the Service Licence should be made in such a way as to minimise the constraints on future developments which such changes might represent

**3. Should the Service Licence for *bbc.co.uk* be developed or changed in order to reflect changes to *bbc.co.uk*, its users' needs and the online market?**

Yes, the ACW considers it essential that the Service Licence for *bbc.co.uk* should be developed and changed periodically, in the same way it was changed following the approval of the BBC’s on-demand proposals by the BBC Trust. The ACW considers that the pace of technological development requires that the *bbc.co.uk* service licence

should be regularly reviewed (probably at least once every three years) so as to remain relevant and appropriate in view of technological developments.