

Terms of Reference

bbc.co.uk service review

Summary

The BBC Trust decided to conduct the service review of bbc.co.uk in 2007, by way of honouring the commitment made by the Board of Governors in response to the Graf Review in 2004. This will be the first service review run by the Trust. In the course of the review the Trust will look at bbc.co.uk's role online, its contribution to the fulfilment of BBC's public purposes, distinctiveness of the service and the way it should respond to the changing web environment. The Trust will gather quantitative and qualitative evidence, as well as seek views of all stakeholders and will actively seek engagement with the licence fee payers throughout the process.

Background

The commitment to undertake periodic service reviews forms part of the Trust's obligation to assess the performance of the BBC and hold the Executive to account. Specifically, the Agreement requires that service reviews be undertaken at least every 5 years and whenever the Trust considers that the public interest demands it. In deciding the order in which it will conduct the service reviews the Trust took into account the commitment made by the Board of Governors of the BBC following the 2004 Graf Review to revisit the BBC online service in 2007.

The terms of reference describe the scope of the review and the Trust's intended approach.

Scope of the review

The service review will consider the following areas.

- How is the service currently performing against its published remit, aims and objectives (as described in its service licence)?
- Are there ways in which the service's remit or its stated aims and objectives should change, in response to changing audience needs and trends in the online market and technologies?
- In what ways does the service contribute to the promotion of the BBC's public purposes and priorities?
- Is the service, both as a whole, and its component parts distinctive?
- Are the current linking and BBC web search policies successful in encouraging users to explore the web beyond BBC content?
- How can the service licence offer accountability and certainty as to the scope of the BBC's increasingly diverse online activities?

Approach

The Service Licences Operating Framework sets out broad guidelines for the service review process. Accordingly, throughout the review the Trust will engage with the licence fee payers, including through the Audience Councils framework and consider changes in the market context and external factors such as technology and user behaviour. To accomplish this the service review will draw on a wide range of evidence.

The Trust will consult with the BBC Executive, examining recent performance, fulfilment of remit, any existing commitments and initiatives and planned development. As part of the process the Executive will be required to make a submission to the review which the Trust will publish. Concurrently, the Trust will carry out a public consultation and commission audience and other relevant bespoke research in order to gain understanding of the BBC's performance and market developments. The Trust will publish the evidence gathered as part of the review at an interim stage before drawing any conclusions.

The evidence submitted by the Executive, drawn from the public consultation, audience research and other sources will be analysed and considered by the Trust before it produces its final report. Having considered this report the Trust may decide to change the bbc.co.uk remit and/or the stated commitments in the service licence.

Timetable

July 2007: Service review commences

July – 14 December 2007: Public consultation and other evidence gathering by the Trust

14 December 2007: Deadline for Executive Submission

January 2008: Trust publishes consultation responses and the Executive Submission

Mid-December – February 2008: Analysis

February 2008: Report finalised and approved by the Trust

Spring 2008: Report published