

Submission to the BBC Trust:
Review of Radio 2 and 6Music



August 2009

Executive Summary

Background

In June 2009, members of the 12 Regional Audience Councils took part in the BBC Trust's review of Radio 2 and 6Music and held discussions at each of their council meetings. Members also talked to their local networks including friends and family ahead of the council discussions, using questions from the Trust consultation document and associated guidance notes to ensure that a diverse range of views was heard about the two radio services.

Meeting the Service Licences and Public Purposes

Members considered that the service licences for the two services were being largely met. Radio 2 was enjoyed and valued by a broad cross-section of listeners across the age spectrum, with strong presenters and specialists, and an offering that was distinctive from Local Radio; in appealing to so many people, it was described as '*having socio-cohesive value*'. There was some question as to whether the service licence requirement to challenge listeners to experience the unfamiliar was happening; in fact most of the music was very familiar.

Most of the public purposes were being met, primarily *Supporting citizenship* through news and travel, Jeremy Vine's programme, and social action campaigns; *Creativity and cultural excellence* with its support for new and live music; and *Reflecting the nations & regions* with a well-established range of contributions from across the UK. It was felt to be low on *Emerging communications* as the website was not pivotal to enjoyment of the station.

In comparison with Radio 2, the strength of 6Music was in its appeal to a more narrow 'niche' audience, and there was a shared view that it needed to be marketed more clearly as such to avoid audience confusion. It was providing a service not available elsewhere else and was highly valued by those described as 'real music lovers'. The service licence was being met and it delivered a number of public purposes including *Creativity and cultural excellence* and *Education & learning* through new music and the fostering of new talent, *Reflecting the nations, regions & communities* with the range of artists featured, and *Emerging communications* through its website.

Radio 2 – the common ground

'Radio 2 has learned the trick of keeping an audience.'

'It's my preferred station and my friends like it too.'

'Amazing music, played by an amazing line-up - the home of great music, entertainment and documentaries.'

'Family listening.'

'A magical transition after the age of 40 when Radio 2 becomes acceptable.'

Radio 2 was judged as:

- very accessible with a good varied balance, strong presenters and largely enjoyed by a broad cross-section of listeners;
- good value for money, a long established favourite in many homes, well marketed and having a strong diversity of music with some specialist programmes;
- strong interaction with listeners and both high quality and humorous presenters that appealed to a wide range of people.

It was generally considered:

- a *'safe station'* which was enjoyed by many;
- having an identity that showed *'humour and participation'*, *'relaxing, chatty, good travel'*, *'ticks all the boxes'*;
- as having *'good flow between the people on air'* and a *'familiar sound'*.

What makes it popular?

- easy listening - *'you don't always want something provocative'*;
- Some made *'appointments to listen'*;
- *'Its strength is its presenters'* – this was a common view; listeners either loved or hated particular presenters including Terry Wogan, Chris Evans, Jeremy Vine, Sarah Kennedy and Jonathan Ross;
- Sunday's programmes were popular, as was the specialist music in the evenings.

What could it do better?

- some older listeners wanted *'more Desmond Carrington and David Jacobs'*;
- weekends were *'something of a mishmash'* although Jonathan Ross was praised as were Alan Carr and Elaine Paige;
- appreciation was not universal with some descriptors including *'lacks identity'*, *'bland and tepid'*, *'wallpaper'*, *'formulaic'*, *'no real surprises'* and *'boring'*;
- two councils and their local networks commented on a perceived lack of female presenters;
- feedback from members' younger networks showed that Radio 2 was perhaps not considered *'cool'*.

Location and DAB

The station was easy to find. Many members listened while in the car as they knew that they would not lose the station. Concerns were expressed about the variation or lack of signal in many areas and in cars without DAB receivers if future listening were to be via DAB.

Website

Few members paid much attention to the website. They did not consider the Radio 2 website to be as important as the Radio 4 website for example, as the station was primarily used for background listening, including in the car. Some members reported that the website was not updated regularly and was difficult to navigate; it was described as *'dull'*.

Radio 2 and Local Radio

There was little support for extensive collaboration between Radio 2 and Local Radio as they were seen as two very different services. If there was to be any collaboration, it should not be at the expense of one service for another; members felt that the two services had separate identities and were concerned lest Local Radio lose its identity. Equally it was felt there would be no added value for Radio 2. Some members suggested that joint promotion of Radio 2 and Local Radio could add value for listeners, and that a regional opt-out similar to that on television news could be enjoyable.

6Music – the common ground

'Aimed at real music lovers.'

'Run by enthusiasts for enthusiasts.'

'A natural destination for former Radio 1 listeners.'

'Real public service broadcasting.'

While Radio 2 was felt to be personality driven, those familiar with 6Music said:

- it was more about the music;
- it took risks, offering *'an eclectic mix of music to suit all age groups'* ;
- it offered *'fascinating artist interviews'* and *'knowledgeable, enthusiastic presenters'*;
- covering Glastonbury was seen as good promotion for the station.

General issues across the RACs included:

- the lack of profile, familiarity and identity for 6Music combined with a lack of awareness of the station;
- for the majority who were unfamiliar with the station, there was a lack of clarity about who the station was trying to appeal to;
- digital access only was seen as a considerable barrier to listeners, and until DAB radios were readily available in cars and digital reception/universal access to digital services improved, it was judged that awareness and take up would remain low;
- listeners accessing programmes via podcast in the Yorkshire & Lincolnshire area reportedly could not hear the music;
- listening via a computer or television was not a familiar or acceptable experience to many members.

Members suggested the need for better branding, with more marketing and promotion to demonstrate who the station was for and to guide listeners to where it could be found. This might be achieved through promotion on the Red Button service and a simulcast of some programmes, and more trails and cross-promotion from other BBC services.

A distinctive radio service

'It's meant to appeal to people with a different slant on music.'

'BBC Introducing has echoes of John Peel'

'I wanted to hear the Kaiser Chiefs music, not what they had been doing that day.'

Members reported that:

- regular listeners said that 6Music provided them with a service they did not get anywhere else;
- of those who had listened regularly, it was considered to be very male oriented;
- it was *'niche'*, *'edgy'* and *'blokey'*, and aimed at those who were serious about music and took more risks;
- the weekend line-up was considered to be good, with Sunday evenings highlighted along with the archives section and described as *'like a treasure trove of neat stuff'* ;
- members acknowledged that 6Music was aimed at *'real music lovers'* but also asked for less banal chatter.

ends

ANNEX

QUESTIONS CONSIDERED BY THE REGIONAL AUDIENCE COUNCILS

The RACs were provided with background information to explain the purpose of the service review for Radio 2 and 6Music. Members were given the service licence summaries for each station and links to both websites along with relevant facts and figures for both services. They were also provided with the following questions to enable consistency of discussion across all 12 RACs.

Radio 2

1. Why is Radio 2 so popular?
2. What would encourage more people to visit the Radio 2 website and listen digitally?
3. What impact do you think Radio 2 has on the performance of the BBC's local radio services?
4. Would greater collaboration between local radio and Radio 2 help?

6Music

1. Why do you think awareness of 6Music is so low and what can be done to improve this?
2. How might the 6Music identity be improved?
3. Approximately 600,000 adults listen to 6Music regularly – why do you think this figure is so low? What can be done to increase it?

General for both services

1. To what extent do you think the services are providing good value for money and producing good quality content?
2. Do you think that some audience groups are better served than others by the two services? If so, which?
3. Are the services sufficiently distinctive from other BBC services and commercial operators?
4. Would greater collaboration between BBC Network Radio and Local Radio services improve the overall performance of the BBC's portfolio?

Finally

Are there any other areas of concern or excellence you or your networks are aware of in the performance of Radio 2 and 6Music?