

# Purpose plan for delivering the BBC public purpose: Sustaining citizenship and civil society

## BBC Trust definition of purpose remit

You can trust the BBC to provide high-quality news, current affairs and factual programming that keeps you informed and supports debate about important issues and political developments in an engaging way. You can look to the BBC for help in using and understanding different kinds of media.

## Purpose priorities

The BBC Trust, after public consultation, has divided this remit into five specific priorities:

- 1 Provide independent journalism of the highest quality.
- 2 Engage a wide audience in news, current affairs and other topical issues.
- 3 Encourage conversation and debate about news, current affairs and topical issues.
- 4 Build greater understanding of the parliamentary process and political institutions governing the UK.
- 5 Enable audiences to access, understand and interact with different types of media.

(The BBC's contribution to the promotion of citizenship is not exclusive to this purpose and will be achieved through its other purposes, particularly [Representing the UK, its nations, regions and communities](#) and [Promoting education and learning](#).)

## Purpose performance

Licence fee payers consider this to be one of the most important public purposes overall and BBC performance is considered to be strong. BBC network news and local news are by far the two most important genres to BBC audiences, both as consumers and as citizens (source: 2004 Human Capital Value Survey). For the public, journalism remains the cornerstone of the BBC.

The BBC faces a number of major challenges in meeting the citizenship purpose and maintaining its position as the most trusted and most used local and UK-wide news provider.

- In the face of changing audience demands and new technologies, the BBC must future-proof the delivery of the above priorities.
- The BBC must maintain the quality and distinctiveness of its news and current affairs output in a tough competitive environment.
- The BBC must maintain the overall reach of its news, information and current affairs, and address declining reach among certain audience groups, including the young, who are moving away from linear news output.
- Overall, audiences regard BBC journalism as reliable, authoritative and trusted, but they want it to become more relevant, modern, accessible, dynamic and courageous. (Creative Future research: A Future for BBC Journalism, Sparkler, September 2005)

In addition, the BBC Trust's Purpose Remit Survey identified specific areas where the public expects the BBC to improve its performance in meeting the citizenship purpose:

- While overall the priority to engage a wide audience in news and current affairs (priority 2) is seen as being delivered effectively, there is a small performance gap among 'low approvers' of the BBC (in particular 35–54 C2DE men).
- Licence fee payers in the devolved nations of the UK consider that the BBC could do more to help them understand how their nations are governed. Audiences also feel that there is room for improvement in how the realities of devolution are reflected in the BBC's network news coverage (priority 4).
- While the priority to promote media literacy (priority 5) did not rate particularly highly in importance, licence fee payers expect the BBC to work harder in this area.

## **BBC management's response to purpose gaps**

Delivering Creative Future, BBC management's six-year framework for the delivery of the BBC's purposes, sets out a strategy to meet the above challenges. A number of key investments (some of which will require the BBC Trust's approval before implementation) will contribute towards future-proofing delivery of the citizenship purpose and addressing the identified gaps. A key challenge will be to reach out to new audiences without jeopardising the support of existing and loyal audiences to BBC news and current affairs.

The BBC's strategic priorities are focused on three areas: strengthening on-demand provision; quality and distinctiveness; and delivering value to all audiences.

### **Strengthening on-demand provision**

In response to changes in audience behaviour and the rapid take-up of broadband and mobile devices, the BBC will make news, analysis and information (for example, weather) available to audiences when, where and how they want it. Initiatives include:

- Upgrading BBC online news to offer increased relevance to individuals, embedded video and audio, aggregation around key events to bring together the best of BBC content and improve links to third-party material, greater opportunities for participation, and an improved multimedia presence for key content brands. Ensuring that BBC content is available and accessible on a range of devices and is available throughout the internet will be key to driving reach among harder-to-reach audiences.
- Enhanced broadband multimedia content will provide a more relevant and distinctive offer for local audiences across the UK. The editorial focus will be on the core areas of local news, sport, weather and travel information, as well as showcasing BBC linear content and more linking to the broader web. (See the purpose plan for [Representing the UK, its nations, regions and communities](#) for more detail.) The expansion of local news and news-related online video content will require regulatory approval from the BBC Trust.

### **Quality and distinctiveness**

The BBC will aim to produce high-quality and distinctive journalism that meets the highest standards of accuracy, fairness and impartiality. It will respond to the Trust's regular reviews of impartiality to ensure strong editorial processes and training. It will also provide a range and depth of analysis not widely available from other UK providers. The focus will be on:

- Preserving the distinctiveness of BBC news, current affairs and documentary content rooted in vivid storytelling, specialist expertise and analysis, eyewitness reportage, and effective presentation and interviews.
- Providing in-depth explanation of the most significant issues facing the UK and the world (such as the Middle East, global terrorism, climate change, public service reform, crime and immigration), all of which will help to support citizenship around a serious news agenda. The BBC will offer in-depth, multi-platform seasons as a means of engaging audiences in these big issues and helping them make sense of the world.

### **Delivering value to all audiences**

The BBC will seek to maintain the value of its offer to core audiences, including those whose patterns of consumption are more traditional. At the same time, the BBC places a high priority on improving engagement with harder-to-reach sections of the audience (notably the young and C2DEs). Online and mobile provide opportunities to extend the reach of news to those younger audiences who are least likely to seek it from traditional sources. The BBC is taking action in the following areas:

- Build on the success of services such as Radio 1, CBBC and BBC Three in engaging younger audiences with news and current affairs, through tailoring content to different platforms and increased online interactivity and participation.
- Increase the relevance of BBC journalism by offering appropriate styles, tones and range of voices for teenagers and younger audiences.
- Make BBC news – text, audio and video – widely available on mobile platforms and 'part of the web'.

Enhanced news provision on BBC One will be crucial in connecting with the widest peak-time audience, including lower income groups. The BBC will also ensure that the tone and style of news and the range of perspectives included in news programmes are sensitive to diverse communities of interest.

The BBC will provide dedicated news and current affairs output for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland which reflects their different political institutions and cultural make-up. (See the purpose plan for [Representing the UK, its nations, regions and communities](#).) At the same time, the BBC's network news output should effectively report the realities of a devolved UK. The BBC has worked hard in recent years to improve the accuracy, balance and relevance of its network news coverage, but there is room for further improvement. The Trust is reviewing the impartiality of the BBC's network news coverage of the nations and BBC management will respond to its conclusions.

At a time of constrained funding, changing audience demands and increased competition, BBC management considers that these proposals will go some considerable way to future-proofing delivery of the citizenship purpose and reducing the identified gaps.

## **Delivering the purpose priorities**

### **1 Provide independent journalism of the highest quality**

BBC Trust: "BBC journalism should be independent, accurate and impartial – providing news and current affairs of relevance, range and depth which audiences trust. BBC journalism should offer a range and depth of analysis not widely available from other UK providers."

All BBC journalism will display the core values of independence, truth and accuracy, impartiality, fairness, and diversity of opinion. The BBC will maintain the strong reputation of its journalism across its portfolio of services and range of output. The quality and distinctiveness of BBC journalism will lie in its ambition to offer a broad, varied, serious and analytical news agenda with strong coverage of the UK, the nations and the English regions, and the rest of the world.

Daily news output will be the bedrock of the BBC's provision across television and radio. It will remain a key element of the peak-time schedule on TV and strive for accuracy, proportionality and context when reporting domestic and world stories.

News programmes on services such as BBC One, CBBC and Radio 4 will be supplemented by fast and comprehensive coverage on the BBC's continuous news outlets (bbc.co.uk, BBC News Channel, and BBCi digital text and interactive TV) and on Radio 5 Live. These outlets have the time and space to cover a wide range of stories, including in-depth coverage of international affairs and events in the UK's nations and regions, going beyond the headlines and bringing important stories to air that do not receive widespread coverage elsewhere. The BBC will aim to deliver breaking news first and, wherever possible, immediately, but not to the detriment of accuracy.

All BBC journalists will operate within an overarching framework of editorial processes, guidance and 'checks and balances' which are designed to ensure the accuracy, impartiality and balance of BBC output. In addition, the BBC will continue to provide in-depth training and support to its journalists, ensuring that they have the necessary skills, tools and knowledge. The BBC will build on the success of its College of Journalism and work with partners to drive an industry-wide focus on journalistic values and standards as well as craft.

The BBC will continue to offer a range and depth of analysis (using its range of specialists in, for example, politics, business, economics, home affairs, Europe and world affairs) not widely available from other UK news providers. It will remain a core BBC mission to report journalistically on Westminster, the devolved institutions, local government and European institutions, as well as be a 'public gallery' from which audiences can see and hear proceedings for themselves.

The BBC will offer comprehensive and in-depth coverage of world affairs in its news output. Its distinctive agenda will be supported by the BBC's international newsgathering bureaux and correspondents who can offer an international context to events and underlying issues. (See the

purpose plan for [Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK](#) for further details on the BBC's role in enhancing UK audiences' awareness and understanding of international issues.) The BBC will aim to improve the quality and impact of its sports journalism, and maintain high standards of independence and impartiality. Sports news, debate, reportage and information will be provided across TV, radio and online. Its business coverage will promote understanding of the world of business and its impact on all audiences who are affected as investors, savers, shareholders, employees and bosses.

The BBC will continue to broadcast a range of long-form journalism, featuring analysis of current events and agenda-setting investigations. Current affairs output will cover a range of international and UK issues, using multiple viewpoints, and provide a depth of analysis not widely available from other UK providers. It will be provided via a range of the BBC's TV and radio services, at times that suit the audience, including in peak time.

The BBC will provide an up-to-date, high-quality weather information service – at the local, UK-wide and international level – across a range of platforms.

## **2 Engage a wide audience in news, current affairs and other topical issues**

BBC Trust: "The BBC should provide news and current affairs that interests and informs people of all backgrounds, ages and levels of knowledge, enabling them to engage with the major issues of today."

Across its portfolio of services, the BBC will seek to offer a broad range of news, current affairs and factual output, serving both core audiences as well as reaching out to other groups who may have moved away from traditional sources of news. The ambition will be to constantly deliver the best and most accessible BBC journalism – whether local, UK-wide or international – to the widest possible audience.

The BBC will meet different audience needs in the following ways, while adhering to the core values of impartiality, accuracy and independence:

- Provide news and current affairs output for a broad-based audience on services such as BBC One, BBC Two and Radio 2.
- Introduce children and teenagers to citizenship issues through its news output and also through programming that reflects social engagement and life skills.
- Present news and analysis in an accessible format, style and language for under-served audiences such as ethnic minority communities.
- Explain and present complex issues in a way that meets the differing needs of diverse communities and place it in context to help all audiences develop a greater understanding of UK and international events. Radio 1, BBC Three and BBC Asian Network will play a particular role.
- Offer outreach initiatives that take BBC news content into secondary schools.
- Provide dedicated news, politics and current affairs output for the nations which reflects their different political institutions and cultural make-up.
- Offer in-depth global news and current affairs programmes that appeal to those interested in global news and cultural affairs.

The BBC will use the opportunity presented by its long-form documentary and current affairs output to explore a wide range of contemporary issues that can engage a variety of viewers across TV, radio and online. A key priority for the BBC will be to provide explanation and analysis of the complex issues that confront the UK and the world (such as the Middle East, global terrorism and climate change). The BBC will offer in-depth, multi-platform seasons as a means of engaging audiences in relevant big issues and helping them make sense of the world.

The BBC will provide content in a form and by delivery mechanisms which make it as accessible as possible for audiences, such as online, mobile devices or at certain times of the day within

linear schedules. The BBC is committed to improving its understanding of how disabled audiences use different media and to exploring their perceptions of BBC service delivery mechanisms.

Broadcast news coverage will be supplemented online with in-depth coverage and analysis across a range of specialist areas (such as education, health, science and nature, and technology). [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) will offer live and on-demand access to the BBC's TV and radio news and current affairs output, short-form content (for example, clips or highlights packages) and live simulcasts of the BBC News Channel, BBC Parliament and Radio 5 Live.

### **3 Encourage conversation and debate about news, current affairs and topical issues**

BBC Trust: "BBC news and current affairs should inform conversation and debate among friends, family and wider groups through forums for debate such as phone-ins and online discussion areas."

The trust that audiences have in the BBC's independence means that they feel comfortable engaging in debates hosted by the BBC. With its values of fairness and impartiality, the BBC is trusted to give an editorial lead to debates and provide a platform for a wide range of views. Across its portfolio of services, the BBC's priorities are to:

- Help audiences understand social and political issues so that they can participate in debate and become more active citizens.
- Encourage the active involvement of the audience on matters of local, UK-wide and international interest, by hosting accessible public debates, encouraging audiences to interact with news and sport output, to comment on issues to BBC correspondents and to put their questions to experts and those in authority. The BBC's radio services will play a particularly important role in this alongside [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk).
- Augment the reporting of major events – plus sports coverage – with user-generated content (such as video, still images and messages submitted by viewers), subject to appropriate editorial controls. Images and video contributed by audiences will play an increasing role in providing up-to-the-minute and diverse coverage of news stories on the BBC.
- Engage audiences in the BBC's editorial decision-making processes, with tools such as editors' blogs.

Beyond news and current affairs output, the BBC will provide audiences with an opportunity to engage with the BBC as citizens, for instance where drama programming stimulates discussion of important social issues.

### **4 Build greater understanding of the parliamentary process and political institutions governing the UK**

BBC Trust: "The BBC should help all its audiences understand how the UK is governed at a European, national, regional and local level."

The BBC will provide comprehensive and in-depth political coverage across its TV, radio and online services, presenting the range of opinion across the party political spectrum, and outside it. This will include regular reporting of Westminster, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, the Northern Ireland Assembly, local government, EU political institutions and international politics; analysis and explanation of policy; and scrutiny of politicians and other public figures.

The BBC will aim to help connect British democracy – and its many democratic institutions – with the public, including those who may not see parliamentary politics as central to their concerns. Its output will aim to make politics and the political process engaging and understandable to a diverse audience, and will be found throughout the schedule and on a variety of outlets and platforms. Central to this, the BBC will develop a multimedia proposition – using BBC Parliament and its other TV and radio services as well as online and mobile offers – that will engage and inform audiences about parliamentary politics from Westminster and national Parliaments and Assemblies to local government institutions (Digital Democracy).

The BBC's nations and regional news services will remain trusted sources of information on local government institutions and on how they affect their audiences. The proposed enhancements to local services (as outlined above) will help to future-proof the delivery of this important role.

The BBC will continue to provide extensive coverage of all UK election campaigns and results, European elections and coverage of the party political conferences on its main TV and radio services. This will include impartial, rigorous and substantial analysis of the political parties' campaigns and issues of interest to audiences. This will not be limited to the major parties but will include key events from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, showcasing devolution in action and representing UK political life beyond Westminster.

The BBC provides the UK's only television service dedicated to covering politics. It will continue to provide BBC Parliament and use it to explore with its viewers the mechanics of government at Westminster, the UK's devolved institutions, and Europe.

## **5 Enable audiences to access, understand and create different types of media**

BBC Trust: "The BBC should help people become 'media-literate' – giving them the confidence to make full use of all media including information technologies. The BBC will help its audiences engage critically with media – to find what they are looking for from trustworthy sources, to understand what it is about, to form an opinion about it and, where necessary, to respond to and interact with it."

Media literacy can be important in helping people to participate equally in society. It is understood that the BBC should fully consider the diverse communications needs of its audiences, particularly those who are currently under-served, and enter a dialogue with its audiences, moving away from the traditional 'receive only' mode of broadcasting. Now that internet take-up has become widespread in the UK, the BBC can adopt a deeper role, building on its position of a trusted online provider. People are likely to trust the BBC to help them understand new and emerging aspects of online digital media, as well as how to read the media and appreciate the practical processes that lie behind the development of media content. The BBC's priorities are to:

- Report on technological developments and help people through the digital media jargon used in the marketplace.
- Encourage audiences to adopt emerging technologies and services, and understand the media environment, including how content is made, presented and accessed.
- Encourage audiences to experiment creatively with digital media tools in order to contribute to the BBC's output and participate in wider society and engage within and across communities of interest.
- Provide advice to enable children to explore online content in safety.

Online activity will enable audiences to engage with each other and the BBC. On-screen and on-air talent, as trusted voices, can encourage people to engage in such ways, while initiatives such as WebWise help demystify the internet. More broadly, online media literacy will be woven into mainstream content and services on [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk).

The BBC will continue to encourage internet adoption by making its programme-related and stand-alone websites accessible, attractive and easy to use, and sources of trusted, impartial, accurate and independent information. It will support new and unsure users or those with additional needs in building their confidence and skills, and encourage audiences to move from passive consumption to active participation and constructive engagement.