

BBC AUDIENCE COUNCILS

JOINT SUBMISSION TO BBC TRUST REVIEW OF BBC NEWS AND BBC PARLIAMENT CHANNELS

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

- Councils believe both channels contribute significantly to the BBC Purposes and fulfil many – though not all – of the objectives of their Service Licences.
- Councils noted the high degree of trust in BBC news reported by most respondents.
- Councils believe that – in a media environment where the concept of impartiality is itself a contested notion – the News and Parliament channels stand high in public perception in this respect, despite some concerns about occasional use of what was perceived as emotive language. Councils note that the attempt to achieve balance on some issues can in itself have a distorting effect, as highlighted in the Trust’s recent Science Impartiality Review. This is an issue which the Trust may feel it is appropriate to address in a pan-BBC context.
- Councils felt there was no added public value in being first with a breaking story by a small margin of time: for BBC audiences, accuracy and significance were the important values. Members noted that some of the stories carried by the BBC’s rivals were of relatively lower importance. Councils noted a desire among a section of the audience for richer, deeper and more thematic reporting.
- Councils agreed that the News channel – and BBC news more widely – should consider how well it represents the nations of the UK. For the smaller nations, this is an issue within the major bulletins at One, Six and Ten as well as for the channel as a whole; the Council in England believes there could be greater use of local correspondents to provide a local dimension to national stories. All Councils believed the channel should build on its success in sign-posting the relevance of news stories to particular nations within the UK by embedding the practice of including policy comparisons from across the UK’s four nations into relevant news items. Members also believed there is scope, and the need, for improved coverage of politics in the English regions. Regarding the coverage of Scottish affairs, the ACS noted that the provision of news for audiences in Scotland is the subject of ongoing work by the BBC Executive.
- Councils noted an audience desire for a wider range of international news on the channel.
- Councils believed that BBC Parliament should do what it can to bring the flexibility and choice afforded by Democracy Live to the TV screens of viewers as IPTV technology evolves and becomes more commonplace. However, although the two services should become better co-ordinated, they should retain distinctive propositions and production values to optimise delivery to different audience groups of the BBC’s public purpose to sustain citizenship and civil society.
- In the context of the Parliament channel, members noted a growing tension between the need to include content of significance to the UK as a whole, and content relevant to

only one part of the UK. Reporting on political matters across the English regions is very limited, and there should be coverage of this.

- In relation to Democracy Live, there were some concerns about difficulties in finding content due to the limited methods of navigation available to the user.

Sources

In preparing this submission, the BBC Audience Councils consulted audiences directly, considered audience data, monitored the relevant services and questioned relevant BBC editors. In addition, work in England drew on the views of regional audience councils.

I - BBC NEWS CHANNEL

I.1 - Accuracy and impartiality

Feedback from engagement events across the UK indicates that audiences rate the BBC News Channel highly for accuracy and trustworthiness. The feedback suggests that, overall, audiences believe that the channel reports on the key domestic and international events relevant to UK audiences, and provides analysis from a broad base of commentators.

ACE saw overall news coverage as ‘excellent, accurate and good at presenting the facts’. Discussion at events in Scotland and Northern Ireland touched on the subjective nature of impartiality and the difficulties facing any broadcaster, including the BBC, in satisfying all shades of opinion. However, there was general agreement that the channel was “*overall, probably as impartial as it was possible to be.*”

Audience comment on two stories in July 2011, which raised issues of accuracy and impartiality, was noted by ACE. Some felt there had been too much speculation in the early stages of the coverage of the shooting tragedy in Norway. And some considered that the channel had, for a period, concentrated on the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal to the exclusion of other equally important stories.

Most councils commented that the channel did not perform as well as it could in “giving voice to a wide range of opinions” and that perceptions of impartiality would be strengthened if a wider range of views and perspectives was represented. One participant commented that the BBC could take more notice of the views of other broadcasters:

“I like to see where the truth is in a story... the assumption is that what the BBC says is the truth... but different angles from different broadcasters would also be interesting.”

A number of respondents raised the issue around balance which had been highlighted in the Trust’s Science Impartiality Review. “*It comes over as unfair because the same importance is given to both sides even if they’re not equally well informed.*”

Overall, the Audience Councils agreed that the channel does set high standards of accuracy and impartiality, though there was scope for increasing the range and diversity of perspectives represented.

1.2 – Breaking news and rolling news

ACE noted a general audience perception that Sky News was ‘first for breaking news’, as it had been with the 2010 general election results: however in considering the conflicting demands of speed versus accuracy, there is a greater sense of trust that News Channel reports will be correct, if not quite as fast.

Feedback from meetings in Scotland and Northern Ireland also indicated a general perception that Sky broke stories first, but that the News Channel was more reliable.

“Sky is the first place to go... they get there first. But the BBC reporting is more considered.”

For many viewers the channel is the default channel of choice for big breaking stories such as the eruption of the Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajökull in April 2010, or the tsunami which struck Japan in March 2011. Recent coverage of the riots in England has served to emphasise the value of both channels, with the rolling news service attracting huge interest from audiences in all parts of the UK and record usage of the channel; and uninterrupted coverage on both services of the proceedings in the re-called Parliament of 1 August 2011.

“I wouldn’t believe it until I saw it on the BBC. I check on the BBC before I panic.”

“You go to the BBC for the facts. It’s not always fastest, but it’s trustworthy.”

“Why ‘first’?... I fear this could be to the detriment of accuracy.”

There was discussion at events held by Audience Council Wales (ACW) and Audience Council Scotland (ACS) of the balance between rolling news and regular updates. Some view the channel for long periods and find regular updates intrusive, others view for short periods and find them useful. Councils believe the channel needs to strike a balance between these two groups of viewers, and generally does this well.

There were many comments that the cycle of headlines was repetitious: this disinclined some to watch for more than a short period.

“It’s not just that it’s the same story... it’s that it’s done in the same way.”

Others tuned in specifically for the headlines. It was suggested that *“it would be good if you could select the stories you wanted - if this was technically feasible.”*

It was commented in Glasgow that the problem could be eased if there was greater variation and development of stories in the regular updates.

While ACE acknowledged the need for a fine balance between the reporting of unfolding news stories, and the repetition of previously broadcast content for new viewers, there was a perception that many viewers wanted less 'repeated' news over the hour, with more range and depth as stories develop.

It was suggested that on occasion, the first 30 minutes could be structured as a normal bulletin, with the second 30 minutes being used to delve further into the news agenda. The 22:00-23:00 news hour on the channel was judged to be a good example of this, covering the main stories in the first half hour and providing deeper analysis in the second half.

Audience Council Northern Ireland (ACNI) quoted comments from participants that while the on-screen ticker-tape headlines were helpful, those who watched for longer periods found them distracting, particularly if they were not regularly refreshed. ACE noted that the strapline across the bottom of the screen hardly seemed to alter in the course of an hour-long bulletin.

Councils considered that the channel should continue to prioritise accuracy over speed of response, with ACW specifically raising the concern that a move towards becoming a 'breaking news' channel could lead to a more superficial service for audiences. The balance between rolling news and regular updates was good; but greater variation in the bulletins and ticker-tape headlines could encourage viewers to stay with the channel for longer.

1.3 - Range, analysis and other issues

Members of ACE highlighted the range of topics covered, with 'hard' news being complemented by business news and more quirky in-depth and cultural features, for example in *Click*.

Recent exceptions cited were the events in Norway, where some audience members thought that the BBC had "not shown its customary professional ease", and "speculation rather than facts being presented"; and coverage of the phone hacking scandal which completely overtook other news coverage for several days.

The concentration on the phone-hacking story was also thought by ACE and ACNI to illustrate a tendency for BBC News to be "overly self-occupied" at the expense of what some might regard as equally or more pressing issues such as the crisis in the Eurozone, or the famine in east Africa.

Overall, there was appreciation at audience events across the UK of the range of subject matter covered on the channel, with numerous spontaneous mentions of individual programmes such as *Simpson's World*, *HardTalk* and *Click*. ACS considered that the channel offered coverage of a wider range of topics than other media.

"It widens your perspective, covering stories from Africa or Asia as well as Europe."

However ACE felt that the range of content was not as broad as that provided by the broadsheet newspapers or the BBC World Service or on some other BBC radio services.

ACNI noted views that the range of disciplines covered by the News Channel was relatively narrow, with a perceived bias towards arts content and away from science and technology.

“My frustration is the number of disciplines in life that BBC editors don’t pay enough attention to, for example civil engineering.”

A more general comment was that there was a tendency to focus too much on one big story. On the day of the meeting in Glasgow, it had been the financial crisis in Greece:

“It’s been coverage of Greece all day with no mention of the public sector strikes coming up on Thursday. Three different BBC editors focusing and analysing the Greece story today – not needed.”

It was also commented that there was room for greater care in the handling of statistics:

“It makes a difference whether a rise in teachers’ pensions is described as going up by 3 per cent, from 6 per cent to 9 per cent— or as being increased by 50 per cent.”

Analysis

Most respondents valued the depth of analysis offered by BBC specialist correspondents, which was seen as helping to clarify complex issues, and provide a wider context which helped audiences to make their own assessment of events. However Councils noted a desire among a section of the audience for richer, deeper and more thematic reporting. It was felt that in-depth reporting of the type found on the World Service could have a place on the channel.

ACE considered that live coverage and reporting by BBC correspondents in the field was strong and provided a depth not available elsewhere. There was comment in Scotland that there was scope, at times, to improve on the analysis provided.

“For instance we were being told that Greece was going to go bankrupt, but there was no explanation of what ‘bankrupt’ would actually mean in real terms.”

“It would be good if it followed up on some of the themes raised in the news such as child labour.”

Feedback from Northern Ireland included the suggestion that the channel could signpost content relevant to a news story available elsewhere on the BBC.

An alternative point of view was that there was too much analysis on the News Channel and that there was a case for presenting more facts and less analysis. Some viewers feel that some commentators “pre-empt the news or predict outcomes”:

“Analysis is essential but often presenters, through analysis, are attempting to tell us what the future is going to be... that’s not what the BBC is about... it should report the facts and implications.”

Presentation

There was high appreciation of the quality of the presenters on the channel. However there were a number of comments on tone and scriptwriting. There were some reservations from audience members about the tone adopted in the links and intros:

“It needs a consistency of serious tone – it doesn’t need to be laid back.”

And there were some concerns about the occasional use of what was perceived as emotive language:

“Using emotive language is not what the BBC should be doing.”

ACNI noted the view that the channel achieved its goals without adopting what was described as the “personality-led” approach which was felt to characterise some other news content available in the market. Generally, it was felt that this was not an appropriate approach for BBC News. However it was acknowledged that there could be value, on occasion, in using “personality” presenters to draw in audiences who would not otherwise be attracted.

Some members of ACE felt the channel could come across as being ‘too worthy’, and could under-estimate viewers’ knowledge and ‘savviness’. Others noted that producers could not assume that all members of the channel’s audience had similar levels of knowledge of the various topics covered, and that some fine editorial judgements had to be made.

ACNI noted what it described as a tendency to try to create visual excitement through on-location reporting – for instance a political development being reported live from Downing Street - where this was not particularly necessary.

“Presentation can sometimes get in the way of substance.”

In conclusion, Councils agreed that the channel covered an appropriate range of subject matter. However, in audience engagement there were frequent comments that global coverage could be more comprehensive and members believe that the channel should ensure that it keeps pace with ever-expanding audience interests. Although coverage of certain topics can put viewers off, audience size should not be a priority for the channel: its public value lies in its provision of a quality and range of coverage not available from other news providers. Members believe that the level of analysis offered by the channel is an important part of its public value, and that this should be maintained and developed. There was no consensus on the tone and style adopted in presentation and journalism on the channel. Councils recognise that this is, to a degree, a matter of personal taste, and believe that the channel successfully combines accessibility and style with an appropriate objectivity and seriousness of purpose.

1.4 - International news

ACE considered that international coverage appeared balanced, measured and impartial with good analysis and use of the BBC’s correspondents and bureaux. A recent example was a package on the historical background to the unrest in Syria carried after the Ten O’Clock

bulletin which had provided helpful context and made links to other events occurring in the Middle East.

Feedback from ACE's local networks suggested an audience appreciation for international reporting on the channel and a desire that these existing high standards be maintained and improved, specifically with the provision of a wider range of international news, and greater reflection of what was perceived as a geo-political shift in recent years from the US and Europe to China, India and elsewhere.

ACE felt this was an area where the BBC should lead the audience, regardless of possible audience resistance to foreign content and/or accents. A comparison was made with BBC World which appears to use a broader range of correspondents and analysts, often varying according to the continent being served; members saw an opportunity to enrich News Channel content through the use of such BBC World or World Service personnel.

ACE members also thought there was scope within the news hour programmes for a larger international news section which would provide more diverse content. One recommendation made by ACE was for versions of *From Our Own Correspondent*, but again members were conscious of limited resources for introducing a broader approach.

ACNI quoted the view that the BBC had "*the right number of reporters, well placed around the world*". On-location reporting (as distinct from presentation) was particularly valued in helping to describe international events, with coverage of recent events in the Middle East a case in point. However, there was a perception that BBC global coverage seemed to favour a "western" view of the world. This view was echoed by other councils. ACNI suggested the channel could carry in-depth thematic report on global issues behind the news, such as the development of emerging/competing economies and new world trade routes.

Councils valued the greater depth of analysis which the News Channel could add to the BBC's international news coverage on TV and suggested that this should be expanded if possible. However, ACW heard from event participants that they considered the channel had lost its pre-eminence in its coverage of international affairs, particularly its coverage of Africa, the Middle and Far East and South America. A further criticism heard by ACW was that the channel's international coverage seemed increasingly to concentrate on the USA and western states of the European Union (rather than Europe as a whole). It would be valuable if the Trust could undertake work to ascertain the accuracy or otherwise of these perceptions and consider appropriate responses.

As noted above, ACNI identified a significant thread of audience interest in the deeper implications of global events and/or issues for the UK or areas of the UK. Events such as the takeover of a Northern-Ireland based company by a company based in Brazil, for instance, or a rise in the price of milk following a drop in production in China, can have significant implications for the local economies. Members noted that there was scope to explore the implications of such stories in greater depth. This could enrich viewers' understanding of the causes and effects of events and decisions, and so contribute to the BBC's public purpose to support citizenship and civil society.

Some viewers questioned the value for money of sending anchors abroad to cover foreign stories when there were already BBC correspondents on location.

1.5 – Political coverage

Councils commended the high quality of coverage of UK politics on the channel. Examples quoted included the last UK General Election and the negotiations which followed the inconclusive result; the coverage of the Scottish Parliament election in May 2011; the coverage of politics in Northern Ireland; and coverage of the referendum in Wales in March 2011. However ACE would like to see improved coverage of politics in the English Regions; members suggested that in the absence of English Regional Assemblies, there was scope for in-depth scrutiny of some of the big issues facing local government in England which this year is making spending decisions of approximately £26 billion of public money on areas such as crime, education, housing and children's services.

ACE, which monitored the channel output for two weeks in June-July 2011, also found that apart from the most major EU stories (the economic crisis in Greece, and the appointment of a new President of the IMF) there was little political coverage from Europe, including of UK MEPs. ACE considered that providing more such coverage would help extend the range of perspectives on Europe available in the UK media. However, ACE concluded that the political reporting and analysis of national, devolved and EU institutions which they had viewed had been consistently accurate and impartial.

ACNI reported appreciation of the quality of coverage of the Northern Ireland Assembly and nations' political affairs in general. This view of political affairs was echoed by other councils: coverage of the major stories from the devolved administrations was considered to be well done. Coverage of non-political stories from the devolved nations is dealt with in the following section.

1.6 - Reflecting the UK's nations, regions and communities

The three Councils from the smaller nations raised issues relating to the balance of news from around the UK on the News Channel and on BBC news generally.

In Wales and Scotland a significant number of participants at events noted what they considered to be over-provision of stories of relevance to England only. ACW concluded that the channel was not fully meeting its Service Licence obligation to "draw on the BBC's newsgathering operations across the UK". As noted elsewhere, it is widely acknowledged that 'sign-posting' of stories for relevance to a particular nation has improved since the Trust's Nations Impartiality review of 2009. But Councils believe there has been less progress on offering a comparative picture of national policy variations across the UK, and that this constitutes a significant shortfall in the channel's obligations. It can also lead to confusion, as coverage of health issues in England could mislead viewers by providing them with information which was not relevant.

"The channel needs to illustrate the different devolutionary positions."

ACW observed that while this might be understandable in short-form bulletins, for reasons of concision, it is less so in a 24-hour rolling news service. These comments were echoed by the ACS and ACNI.

ACS noted that only the most significant devolved stories received coverage and commented that they “felt like an add-on” rather than an integral part of the channel’s output.

“The news is in general very accurate however it barely mentions Scotland.”

“I’m not sure the BBC has really got the point of devolution. There’s not really enough reporting from a Scottish perspective.”

ACS considers that this raises significant questions about the delivery of the citizenship public purpose in Scotland at a time when the public sphere is expanding: if UK services cannot offer comprehensive provision, then there is greater obligation on services for audiences in Scotland to do so. The provision of news for audiences in Scotland is the subject of ongoing work by the BBC Executive.

ACNI reported concerns that voices from all around the UK should be heard, and that time should be taken to explain differences in public policy. As discussed in section 1.4, members noted that audiences have a particular interest in events which have a direct local impact, such as the OFT investigation into car insurance announced in September 2011 which has special resonance in Northern Ireland where premiums are higher than elsewhere in the UK. Some felt that competing rolling news services offered more comprehensive analysis of the impact of global events on communities in the UK.

ACE noted what it described as “significant improvement” in coverage of news from the four UK nations following the Impartiality Review, bringing what they considered to be good contextual analysis within the UK agenda, and referencing where devolved matters have resulted in different policies across the nations. However, there was scope for improvement: the channel could assess the impact of devolution in the nations in more detail, through the greater use of local correspondents to provide a local dimension to national developments; and in particular there was a need for more detailed coverage of politics in the English regions.

ACE believed that, to a degree, it was “inevitable” that BBC News would have a greater emphasis on news about England than the other three nations; members felt that the judgement must be whether a local, regional, or nations story had UK significance and resonance.

The major bulletins

The major BBC news bulletins at One, Six and Ten are a significant part of the News Channel’s offering and were the subject of comment at audience engagement events across the UK.

There was comment in Wales that the major bulletins “do not provide in-depth coverage of events in the UK nations and regions” and it was suggested that the lead stories of bulletins in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should be routinely carried by the News Channel.

“BBC news has an inbuilt English bias... news from other nations is just an optional extra

Overall, Councils felt there was scope on the channel for stronger representation of communities across the regions of England, and in the nations; and for more explanation and comparison of different policies in the various legislative areas of the UK.

1.7 - Distinctiveness

ACE considered that the channel incorporates the strengths of the BBC’s main news coverage with the opportunity to provide a more detailed and intelligent analysis. Members believed it was important that the channel continue to incorporate a diversity of comment on events, and not just rely on political interviews and a summary from the relevant BBC correspondent.

Respondents in Wales generally considered the channel to be high quality and distinctive and to assist the BBC in delivering its citizenship purpose but some respondents at ACW outreach events said they thought the channel had lost its pre-eminence in coverage of international affairs.

ACNI reported feedback suggesting the News channel was not particularly distinctive compared with other BBC news services, and that competitors offered a greater variety of content, segmented into separate programmes and featuring well-known presenters who had developed into media personalities. Some expressed the view that the News channel could generate a wider audience if it adopted this approach, while others disagreed, preferring the News channel’s content-led approach.

In sum, Audience Councils felt there was scope for the News channel to heighten its distinctiveness by offering a broader range of perspectives on current events, and more wide-ranging coverage of global affairs.

1.8 - Future strategy

The ACW was concerned at suggestions that BBC News might evolve into a ‘breaking news’ channel, leading to a more superficial service for audiences. Members considered that the channel’s performance could be weakened by further cost savings.

Members of all Councils expressed concerns that further economies could damage the channel’s newsgathering capability. It was felt that this could drive the channel to put increasing emphasis on coverage of ‘breaking stories’, which members believed would diminish its public value.

2 – BBC PARLIAMENT

2.1 - Accuracy, impartiality and range

Councils found that amongst those viewers who were aware of BBC Parliament, appreciation of the channel was strong.

“The quantity and quality of coverage is just outstanding.”

ACE believed BBC Parliament fulfilled the criteria of its Service Licence well, noting its unique service to audiences across the UK in the provision of detailed political coverage. However members were disappointed with the small amount of coverage of politics in Europe, which they felt would add public value considering the impact of European Parliament decisions on life in the UK.

The absence of editing and commentary on proceedings was generally valued, and seen as contributing to the impartiality of the service. In feedback to ACNI it was observed that this allowed audiences to make their own evaluations of proceedings.

At the audience event held by ACS, there was good awareness of the channel, with a number of those attending tuning in regularly for *First Minister’s Questions* and *The Record Review*. There was also appreciation of the coverage of European affairs in *The Record Europe*. As a whole, the channel was valued as increasing the visibility of the democratic system, and in motivating MPs to be seen to be effective.

“It’s a window on how democracy functions.”

“The fact that we can watch is a discipline on the MPs... it’s good for democracy.”

“It needs to be there... even if only to remind them that we can see what they’re doing.”

At the Scottish event, coverage of UK committees was praised but it was commented that there could be better coverage of Scottish Parliament committees. ACNI reported particular appreciation of coverage of the devolved institutions. Audience Council Wales commented that BBC Parliament is a unique service and is highly valued by those who use it.

Some viewers took a less appreciative view.

“The impression is that there’s padding to fill time, for example the three hour broadcast of the London Assembly which is boring for all of us, including the Nations. Other examples included a debate on Coventry schools and one from the US House Armed Services Committee – it needed editing!”

“There are some slabs of very turgid stuff.”

Some viewers noted a heavy incidence of repeats. ACE suggested moving some content onto the Democracy Live site after the first showing. One attendee at the audience event in Scotland suggested closing the service down and using the spectrum for something else.

2.2 - Format and context

ACE noted that the coverage of Select Committees was among the most interesting aspect of the output sampled during the two weeks in which members had monitored the channel. During that period, sessions on new arrangements for policing in England and on an Ofgem enquiry into energy pricing were both said to have been “quite absorbing”. Members commented that such coverage highlighted a different aspect of parliamentary work from what was described as the “noise” of Prime Minister’s Questions, and noted that in these instances, context and explanation were well handled and provided a very useful backdrop to the interaction between the MPs and their witnesses. ACE members also expressed a desire to see more reporting from Strasbourg and Brussels.

However, when it came to full parliamentary debates, a distinction was made between the absence of commentary and the provision of essential information which allowed viewers to follow debates. It was felt that for this element of the output, the provision of more background and guidance for viewers about parliamentary procedures would be likely to improve their understanding of the debates. Most Councils reported audience suggestions for greater contextualisation of the subject matter of debates, and more information on the duration and structure of the debates themselves. For instance it was suggested that navigational information such as ‘30 minutes in/vote coming up’ would be useful for viewers. ACS commented that the channel could do more to explain the procedures and vocabulary of Westminster, which were sometimes arcane.

There was also some evidence that some potential viewers were unable to locate content they wished to view.

“I wanted to watch the animals in circuses debate but I couldn’t find out where or when it was on.”

It was commented that the BBC is very good at flashing up a ‘watch now’ message on the website but not so good at running one on the channel itself.

With very limited reporting of political matters across the English Regions (as opposed to Westminster), ACE members asked if there might be an opportunity for BBC Parliament to show a weekly round up or highlights from the various regional *Politics Shows*, or devise a new programme on political developments from the English Regions to serve the English electorate.

ACW commended the BBC News Channel for its regular references to BBC Parliament during its own Westminster coverage. However Councils felt that, overall, the channel suffered from low awareness and, with the exception of the News Channel, was not promoted to viewers as well as it could be by other BBC services.

2.3 - Coverage of the devolved institutions

ACE commented that broadcasting of sessions from the National Assembly for Wales and Scottish Parliament was useful, and comprehensible to viewers outside those nations, but that overall, coverage on BBC Parliament should be proportionate and should take cognisance of population sizes. The main criteria for inclusion should be 'significance to the

UK as a whole' and 'newsworthiness', and not the fact that something happens to originate or take place in a particular locality. Recognising the difficulties involved in dividing up the available airtime, members suggested that split screens could be used to allow for coverage of more activity from across the devolved nations.

ACS identified the same issue, commenting that the same issues of relevance to different audiences across the UK arise for the Parliament channel as for other services. Members acknowledged that from the perspective of audiences in England, there might be over-exposure of the devolved legislatures. However from Scottish and other perspectives the channel can, conversely, appear to be weighted too heavily in favour of Westminster business and so to disproportionate coverage of England-only affairs. ACS noted that the vast majority of issues affecting those living in Scotland were the responsibility of Holyrood.

It was observed that BBC Parliament carried repeats of BBC One's *Question Time* and it was suggested that it could also carry *QT*-style programmes from Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. This would improve BBC Parliament's coverage of issues specific to audiences in the nations, which were under-exposed on the channel, and also enrich debate on public policy across the UK.

2.4 - The Democracy Live website

ACE concluded that Democracy Live was "interesting and comprehensive". Members noted that the sessions on the video wall were often recorded, so the content was not always strictly speaking "live", however that was a function of the institutions covered. ACNI considered the service to be a valuable window on government and democracy at work.

ACE felt that although the service was complementary to that provided by BBC Parliament, it retained an independent identity. ACS noted areas of duplication between the two services at a time when there was pressure on spectrum and some network radio services had been dropped from DTT in Scotland. Overall, members felt it was important for the services to retain distinctive identities: this increased public value as the production values of Democracy Live were "more immediate and contemporary, and so more likely to appeal to younger voters". ACE also noted an occasional 'disconnect' between the two services, and recommended greater co-ordination, and more online amalgamation. The ambition should be for BBC Parliament to be a 'broadcasting' platform for general interest; with the minority interest content on an online 'narrow-casting' service. One member suggested both services should be online-only, once universal broadband access was achieved.

ACE considered that the content and design were appropriate and very easy to navigate. The search facility was queried, with some unfavourable comparisons made with Google when looking for individual MPs/select committees, from a member who uses the site for professional work. ACNI agreed that 'usability' was an issue: the service should aim at maximal functionality to make it as easy as possible for users to find out what democratic institutions do.

Most Councils noted that the service suffers from low awareness and lack of promotion. While the site is well cross-referenced on BBC Parliament, it could be trailed more

extensively on other channels, such as the News Channel, in order to attract a wider audience than just viewers to BBC Parliament.

ACW concluded that Democracy Live was a significant contributor to the delivery of the public purposes with the advent of services such as *Senedd.tv*, the National Assembly for Wales' own AV web-based service, doing nothing to diminish the popularity or appreciation of Democracy Live.

ACNI reported that Democracy Live was viewed as a valuable resource of information on government and democracy at work. Audiences appreciated being able to embed content from the Democracy Live website in their own websites and ACNI noted that while audience awareness levels were relatively low, appreciation scores were high.

Future strategy for Democracy Live

With the increasing availability and audience penetration of IPTV during the years to come, ACW expects to see increased convergence between BBC Parliament and Democracy Live. This could enrich the service by offering audiences choice of the 8 feeds accessible through Democracy Live. However, as noted above, ACE valued the capacity of service to attract younger users by adopting production values more likely to appeal to younger age groups.

Another matter specifically raised with ACW was the viewing time-window on the iPlayer for BBC Parliament content. Public Affairs Cymru argued to the Council that the 7 day iPlayer window for viewing content previously broadcast on BBC Parliament was inadequate and should be lengthened to a 14 day or longer time window.

ACNI felt that there should be much more vigorous promotion of both BBC Parliament and Democracy Live on other BBC services, and agreed that the two services could become much more closely linked.