

RESPONSE BY THE INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING TRUST TO THE BBC TRUST'S REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND CONTENT

August 2008

INTRODUCTION

While we broadly applaud the BBC for its children's output, as the dominant UK supplier of a varied schedule which includes factual, drama, animation and entertainment for children under 12, we urge the BBC Executive and the BBC Trust to work harder to deliver content which meets the public purposes as defined in the BBC Charter and their related purpose remits, especially the purpose remit *Bringing the UK to the World and the World to the UK* which IBT believes is being under-served currently in all genres of programming outside news.

While we recognise that the six public purposes should not be seen as entirely separate aims but as parts of a whole, whose boundaries necessarily overlap, in this submission, we primarily focus on the delivery of the purpose remit, *Bringing the UK to the world and the World to the UK* since this is IBT's area of expertise. We focus on television provision for children on BBC1, BBC2, CBBC and CBeebies because, again, this is where our expertise lies and do not address radio, online or schools content.

This response is largely based on evidence collected for IBT's *Screening the World Report* which was verified by the BBC and was released in June 2008. Copies of the report and detailed data are available from IBT or online from the IBT website: www.ibt.org.uk. The data collected for this report provides empirical evidence of a low level of programming about the wider world.

Without quoting the entire wording of the purpose remit *Bringing the UK to the World and the World to the UK*, there is one paragraph in the annexe which IBT believes are crucial to BBC output for children and would like to draw attention to within this submission:

'....a public service imperative for the BBC [should be] to make UK audiences aware of international issues, cultures and viewpoints. This should be achieved through the

provision of engaging content across a wide range of genres and across all BBC platforms.¹

We broadly support this definition of the purpose remit *Bringing the UK to the World and the World to the UK*, and we applaud the expressed ambition to inform and engage viewers with what is happening in the wider world.

We stated in IBT's submission to the BBC Trust for the purpose remits consultation in April 2007, "there appears to be little or no ambition to engage a **mass audience at peak time** in matters outside the UK"². IBT's 2008 research demonstrates this point clearly. Therefore, we encourage the BBC Trust and BBC Executive to examine whether this purpose remit is being adequately delivered across all programming genres and platforms and to take steps to ensure it is given greater priority, in line with the other five purpose remits.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS POSED IN CONSULTATION

1. Overall, how well do you feel the BBC meets the needs of children aged 12 or under?

It is clear that understanding the wider world is considered by the public to be a crucial element of Public Service Broadcasting: "statements relating to delivery of programming which informs people's understanding of the world are deemed to be the most important elements of PSB by the majority of UK viewers"³

With reference to children's programming, Ofcom concluded in its research released in November 2007 that "children's PSB is still seen as important by parents of children all ages, however it has one of the largest gaps between satisfaction and importance, with just under half of all parents seeing the PSB channels together as performing well"⁴

IBT concludes from these two statements the fact that the public want programmes which tell them about the wider world and believe these are essential for children as well as adults.

IBT's recent research shows that the level of programming on BBC1, BBC2, CBeebies and CBBC which tells children about the wider world is much lower than we would expect considering the fact that one of the six purpose remits is dedicated to this aspect of content.

Data for newly originated children's programming on BBC One and BBC Two in 2007 shows a diverse range of countries was covered which we welcome but only a

¹ BBC Trust, Purpose Remits, *Bringing the UK to the World and the World to the UK*, annexe II, para 2.2 The BBC Role

² IBT submission to BBC Trust Purpose Remit Consultation, April 2007, p 3

³ Ofcom PSB Annual Report 2008, executive summary p. 2

⁴ Ibid p. 4

total of 77 hours of new programming which featured the world outside the UK was transmitted out of a total of 803 hours of first-run originated programming.⁵ This figure, which represents less than 10% of first-run originated output, we believe, should be higher if the BBC is to meet its commitment to *Bring the World to the UK*.

In response to the specific questions posed in this section, research by Ofcom demonstrates that the BBC is generally delivering programmes and content for children which is engaging, well produced and informative.⁶

We believe that the BBC does offer something not available from other providers because it broadcasts a varied programming mix which includes most genres, unlike many of the specialist children's channels which are over-reliant on animation, much of it from the US. We particularly applaud the BBC for its children's factual output in *Newsround* and *Blue Peter*. Both these programmes show an understanding of the wider world and use imaginative, innovative methods to engage the audience in what is going on in the world. Having said that, we want to stress that we do not see factual programming as the only genre which should deliver the purpose remit *Bringing the World to the UK*; we believe all genres should deliver content which informs us about the wider world.

IBT would like to encourage the BBC Executive to consider a shift in perspective. In addition to more content which is about countries and people outside the United Kingdom, we believe that all programmes should inherently encourage understanding of other cultures and of the wider world. This would help children understand the world immediately around them (i.e. the UK) and also encourage them to think about how the UK fits into the world in a global sense. We believe that, in turn, this will encourage children to think more about their role in the world, not just as UK citizens, but as global citizens.

It is our belief that this ambition is achievable but it will require a significant shift in perception by all programme makers within the BBC before it is delivered.

2. How well do you think CBeebies on television, radio and online does each of the following things? Helps children to learn. Encourages children's interest in cultural or creative activities. Reflects different groups, cultures and communities.

IBT's research shows that for a sample 2 week period in 2007, Cbeebies transmitted 9.4hours of programming (out of a total of 182 hours) which focused on the world outside the UK. Just over half of this content (4.9 hours) was set in Africa thanks to *Mama Mirabelle's Home Movies*. No other entire (i.e. not magazine) programmes during this two week period strongly featured the world outside the UK. ⁷

⁵ Ofcom PSB Report 2008, p. 221

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Screening the World, IBT, 2008

We believe this level of programming which tells children about the wider world (just over 5%) is low and this is evidence of a failure to deliver the commitments expressed in the purpose remit *Bringing the UK to the World and the World to the UK*.

Additionally, we note that in the Statements of Programme Policy published by the BBC Executive for 2008 there is not even a reference in the section on CBeebies as to how this service delivers the BBC purpose *Bringing the UK to the World and World to the UK*.

We would suggest that the low level of content about the wider world on CBeebies and this omission in the Statements of Programme Policy demonstrate a lack of will on the part of the BBC to deliver content which tell us about the wider world on CBeebies. We would urge the BBC Trust to query the Executive over this apparent lack of will.

In response to the specific questions raised in this section of the consultation, we reply as follows:

Helps children to learn – We applaud *Our Planet*, the *Pingu Show*, *Tommy Zoom* and *Mama Mirabelle's Home Movies* for broadening children's horizons and understanding of other environments/countries. We also congratulate programmes such as *Teletubbies* and, *Charlie and Lola* where the content often refers to a variety of cultures, places and people. But IBT believes that the purpose remit *Bringing the World to the UK* could be more widely implemented across all CBeebies programming, helping to explain geographical boundaries and introduce British children to the concept of difference – in terms of race, culture and place.

Encourages children's interest in cultural or creative activities – Again, we generally commend the service in its ability to engage children in creative activities but believe that more could be done to include content which tells them about cultural activities in other countries.

Reflects different groups, cultures and communities: we do not believe that CBeebies achieves this goal. We believe far more effort should be made to reflect the diversity of the UK population and the diversity of peoples and cultures in the wider world. Because of children's natural interest in animals, programmes which feature wildlife or animals are one of the primary vehicles for presenting information about the wider world, as in *Mama Mirabelle's Home Movies*. While we in no way suggest these programmes should be replaced, IBT believes that more programming showing *human* stories from around the world should be available for a younger audience, whether they be animated or drama or factual. Through good storytelling such programmes could engage the younger audience in the world outside their immediate sphere, whether that world is within the UK or further afield.

3. How well do you think CBBC on television and online does each of the following things?

Engages children with ideas of citizenship, life skills and social issues.

Helps children to learn.

Encourages children's interest in cultural or creative activities.

Reflects different groups, cultures and communities.

Keeps children in touch with world events.

The comments we have made in response to the specific questions posed about CBeebies, equally apply to CBBC.

In some respects, evidence from IBT's recent research indicates that CBBC performs better than CBeebies with reference to the purpose remit *Bringing the World to the UK* but this is only due to the presence of *Blue Peter* and *Newsround*, both of which make a significant contribution to coverage of the wider world.

The *Screening the World* data showed that CBBC's drama and mystery programmes which were set in international locations told us little about the wider world because the content was not about the places in which they were set and therefore did little to expand our understanding of the world.

In factual, series such as *Serious Andes* play a valuable role in introducing children to the world outside the UK but we would argue that in this series the focus could easily shift to include more interaction between the British children and the country/people they are visiting which would tell us more about the wider world without undermining the premise of the programmes.

While drama and some factual output on CBBC fail to deliver this purpose remit, we would like to comment on *Blue Peter* and *Newsround* because they make such a significant contribution to the public purpose of CBBC.

Newsround and *Blue Peter* both play a crucial role on CBBC in **engaging children with ideas of citizenship, life skills and social issues**. They also **encourage children's interest in cultural and creative activities** and they both successfully **reflect different groups, cultures and communities**. They are probably the programmes which most successfully on the BBC **keep children in touch with world events**.

Data from IBT's research for *Screening the World* shows that "Blue Peter's coverage was ...more varied [in terms of numbers of countries covered] than ITV1, Channel 4 or Five during 2007. " ⁸ Examples of entire *Blue Peter*

⁸ Screening the world, IBT, 2008 p 4

programmes which were filmed abroad include *Jungle Survival* in Bolivia, *Sand, Scree and Scrums* in Namibia and *Blue Peter on Ice* in Sweden. Additionally short local reports were shot in 9 different countries during the year. Finally, there were 8 studio features which directly related to foreign countries or international themes. Approximately 10% of *Blue Peter's* total content focused on the world outside the UK during 2007.

For *Newsround* data was collected from a two week period and this shows that the programme had at least one international report every other day. In IBT's opinion, possibly more significant than the actual minutage of international content was the approach of the production team to the subjects they covered. The reports transmitted during this two week period demonstrated a contextualization and understanding which is often lacking in news programmes but which IBT considers to be essential in order for audiences to understand the world around them.

“rather than being isolated reports about one-off events, the reports...ran over several consecutive days.. This type of coverage helps children to build up a more rounded impression of what everyday life is like in these countries compared to the traditional news approach”⁹

We cannot stress enough how highly we regard these two programmes for their approach to the wider world and their achievements in fulfilling the public purposes as set out in the BBC Charter.

Having praised *Blue Peter* and *Newsround*, we would strike a note of caution regarding the marketing of these programmes. With viewing figures of on average between 200,000 and 400,000 per episode, both programmes have less impact and reach than they used to. IBT would urge the BBC to dedicate marketing resources to promote both programmes in order to ensure their profile is high among children and parents and they increase their reach and impact.

4. How well do you think the BBC's formal learning resources on-line (including the BBC Schools web pages) on television (on BBC Two and CBBC Class TV), and on radio help primary school children to learn?

Not relevant to IBT's research

5. How well do you think other programmes and content for children on TV, radio, BBCi and online do each of the following things? (Other content includes Radio 4's Go4it and BBC 7's Big Toe Books).

Helps children to learn.

Encourages children's interest in cultural or creative activities.

Reflects different groups, cultures and communities.

⁹ Screening the World, IBT, 2008 p 8

Not relevant to IBT's research

6. How well do you think the BBC helps children to understand and benefit from new communications technology such as digital, interactive and on-demand content?

Not relevant to IBT's research

7. How well does the BBC serve children from different backgrounds? Please consider for example: the part of the UK where children live, the type of area where children live (e.g. inner city, rural), family background, age, gender, ethnic or cultural background, religion or belief and disability.

IBT supports fully the ambition for the BBC to appeal to a racially, culturally and geographically diverse audience and believes this goal should apply for programmes aimed at the children's audience.

We want to point out that information about the wider world is crucial to the ethnic minority audience, because often they have family connections outside the UK.

8. How good is the BBC at providing a safe environment for children aged 12 or under?

Not relevant to IBT's research

9. How good is the BBC at providing a range of subjects for children? (For example, drama, entertainment, comedy, cartoons, news and informative programmes?)

It is clear from IBT's recent research that the BBC provides a wider range of genres of programming for children than any other provider in the UK. As stated above, the variety the BBC offers for children distinguishes it from other specialist children's broadcasters which are over-reliant on animation, much of it from the US.

Having said that, we stress that while the BBC's delivery of the purpose remit *Bringing the World to the UK* is strong for older children (6-13 year olds) in factual because of the contribution of *Blue Peter* and *Newsround*, it is weak in other genres for this age group and misses opportunities which are readily available. As stated above, the *Screening the World* data showed that while CBBC had drama and mystery programmes which were set in international locations, the content was not about the places in which they were set and therefore did little to expand our understanding of the wider world.

In factual, while series such as *Serious Andes* play a valuable role in introducing children to foreign countries we would argue that in this series, for example, the focus could shift to include more interaction between the British children and the country/people they are visiting which would tell us more about the wider world without undermining the premise of the programmes.

IBT believes all genres should deliver content which includes information about the wider world. From our recent research it is clear that the BBC could deliver the purpose remit, *Bringing the World to the UK*, better for children across all genres, rather than just in factual for older children.

10. Do you think the BBC's programmes for children on television and radio are available at convenient times?

We would welcome an extension of the CBBC schedule from 7pm to 9pm, which would allow older children to watch programming designed and made specifically for them, rather than them migrating to other channels where they watch content which is designed for an adult audience and is potentially less appropriate. Programming from 7 to 9pm could be designed to appeal to the older children in the 6-13 age group.

11. The BBC provides children's programmes and content in a range of different ways – on BBC One, BBC Two, dedicated children's channels, radio, and online. Do you think the BBC has got this balance right?

This area is not covered by IBT's research and therefore we make only a brief comment which is an observation based purely on superficial study of the schedules without any detailed data to support it.

There appears to be no programming on the terrestrial channels (BBC One or BBC Two) for children aged 0-6 years old in the afternoon. This means that if a family with children this age does not have access to multi-channel viewing, there is no provision for them after CBeebies closes down on BBC Two. While we accept that the vast majority of families with children are in multi-channel homes, there is a percentage (approximately 10%) who are unable to access Cbeebies and we believe this is an error on the BBC's part. It runs counter to the principle of the BBC's primary output being free for all.

12. Currently, the BBC spends around £100 million a year on children's programmes and content. This is approximately £4.20 of each licence fee. Do you think this is good value for money for the licence fee payer?

While it may be good value for money for the adult licence fee payer, we would argue that it isn't good value for the children of Britain aged 0-15 who make up

19% of the population.¹⁰ With the reduced licence fee settlement and tightening of budgets one of the first elements to be dropped in order to save money is filming abroad because programme-makers argue it is more costly than filming in the UK. We dispute whether this is always the case, but regardless IBT believes that more funding should be apportioned for children's programming and young people's programming, thus reflecting better the proportion of the UK population who are children.

13. So far, the questions in this consultation document have been designed to assess how well the BBC's provision for children is meeting the commitments set out in the service licences. Aside from the answers you have already given do you have any further comments on how well service licence commitments are being met?

It is IBT's opinion that the commitments as laid out in the service licences of BBC One, CBBC and CBeebies are largely being met.

However it appears there is a shortfall on BBC Two.

*BBC Two should ensure that its factual music and arts output reflect international themes, and the channel should show high quality non-UK output across a range of genres including feature films, sport, children's, drama and comedy when available at reasonable cost.*¹¹

From our research it is clear that very little 'non-UK output' which told us about the wider world appeared for children on BBC Two during 2007. The only output IBT data shows was transmitted during this period was CBBC's *Saving Planet Earth*, 4 episodes of 25 minutes long, and 20 10-minute episodes of *Mama Mirabelle's Home Movies*.¹² We would consider this output to be too low to fulfil this commitment in the service licence.

14. What are the challenges and opportunities facing the BBC's provision for children aged 12 or under? What is the right role for the BBC in serving this age group in future?

This area is outside IBT's specialist expertise, but we would like to stress that we perceive the enormous potential offered by interactivity and online content in engaging children in the future. The BBC needs to remain a key player in the development of online material for children under 12 in the UK in order to maintain its profile and position in the market.

¹⁰ Source: Mid-year population estimates: Office for National Statistics, General Register Office for Scotland, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

¹¹ Service Licence, BBC Two April 2008 p. 6

¹² Screening the World, IBT, 2008

It is IBT's belief that online content is inherently 'international' in the sense that it brings people together around the world on the internet, allowing communication between geographically diverse communities. IBT would like to see greater commitment from the BBC to ensure that the purpose remit to *Bring the UK to the World and the World to the UK* is at the heart of its online strategy.

15. Is there anything else that the BBC should do differently to meet children's needs better in the future? Do you have any other thoughts about how the BBC's Service Licences covering children's provision should change?

It is IBT's view that the Service Licences for BBC One, BBC Two, CBBC and CBeebies are inadequate to deliver the ambition set out in the purpose remit, *Bringing the UK to the World and the World to the UK*.

Without reiterating the whole document, we presented this argument in detail in our submission to the BBC Trust in April 2007, focussing on the main terrestrial channels and BBC3 and BBC4, we would like to repeat some key points:

'BBC1 and BBC 2 do not accurately reflect current output with regards to the international content they are showing.... In recent years there has been a significant amount of programming concerning the wider world and international affairs on both BBC1 and BBC2 and it is our understanding there is a significant amount planned for the rest of this year and next year. BBC4 is the only Service Licence to include a Condition on the purpose *Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK* and this does not accurately reflect current output.'

IBT notes that there is a classification of the different public purposes in the Service Licences from 'very important' to 'important' to 'should play its part in contributing to this purpose amongst its audience'. This classification demonstrates a clear prioritisation of the six public purposes and from this classification IBT is disappointed to observe that *Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK* is a consistently low priority. We question why this is the case when recent, current and planned output show it to be a priority.

While this consultation asks whether the Service Licences accurately reflect what is on air now, rather than what should be on air, IBT is concerned that if the new Service Licences are simply variations of the current Service Licences then the public purpose to *Bring the UK to the world and bring the World to the UK* will be neglected because in the current Service Licences it is consistently presented as the lowest priority, despite, as stated above, this running counter to the hours of programming concerning the wider world which has been recently transmitted.

In our opinion there will need to be significant changes made to the current Service Licences in order to reflect the importance of this public purpose. Specifically, it is IBT's view that more conditions are required in the Service Licences for this contribution to public value in order to reflect current output.

While we concede that BBC Three's Service Licence is accurate in presenting what is currently on air, we question whether the channel can seriously fulfil its obligation to

Bring the world to the UK through its news and current affairs output which consists of 60 second bulletins.’¹³

IBT stands by all these comments and our research released in 2008 further supports these statements made in April 2007.

Screening the World shows that adult international programming is being marginalised from the terrestrial channels onto BBC4. It also shows that there is general stereotyping of countries outside the UK.

With reference specifically to children’s output we have demonstrated in this submission that the amount of programming for children aged 0-12 which tells them about the wider world is inadequate on BBC1, BBC2, CBBC and CBeebies.

It is IBT’s opinion that the service licences which refer to children’s content across all platforms should be revised to include greater commitment to the purpose remit *Bringing the World to the UK* and would welcome the opportunity to discuss these revisions with the BBC Trust.

Background: IBT

The International Broadcasting Trust (IBT) is an amalgamation of two sister organisations: the former Third World and Environment Broadcasting Project (3WE) and former International Broadcasting Trust (IBT). The new IBT is a charity which seeks to promote high quality television and new media coverage of matters of international significance. In the past, 3WE has been active in this area and this submission fully reflects 3WE’s long history of campaigning on these issues and arguing that international coverage on television is a necessary tool in informing us all, as global citizens.

IBT represents a coalition of international charities. Its members include: ActionAid, Amnesty International, British Red Cross, CAFOD, Care UK, Christian Aid, Comic Relief, Concern UK, Friends of the Earth, Merlin, Oxfam, Plan UK, Practical Action, Progressio, RSPB, Save the Children, Sightsavers International, Skillshare International, Tearfund, UNA UK, UNICEF UK, VSO, the World Association for Christian Communication and World Vision. IBT is a registered charity, number 326150.

The views in this submission reflect the concerns of IBT’s member agencies regarding adequate common understanding of the world in which we live. These concerns are shared by millions of UK supporters of our organisations. IBT’s members, being intimately and operationally concerned with the effects of ‘globalisation’ on communities and environments around the world, and with

¹³ IBT Submission to the BBC Trust Service Licences Consultation, April 2007

communicating across the world, welcome the advent of the global information society (GIS).

IBT's argument, reflected in all our policy work since 1997, is that television coverage of the developing world should not just focus on images of suffering which is more often than not what is presented in news coverage. Our view is that, as UK citizens, we are all at the same time citizens of a global information society. We have needs, rights and interests in being informed and educated about both our own society and that wider international society of which we are part. This is especially so now that it is readily apparent that events and processes in the wider world have both direct and indirect effects on how we live our lives. September 11th has taught us all that -- even if we should already have been aware of it through HIV/AIDS, global warming, environmental degradation, international migration, the integration of world trade and the migration of jobs and services.

It is IBT's view that an international dimension should be an integral part of all programming. If that were the case, then there would be a greater blurring of boundaries and distinctions in the BBC's general programming, between so-called 'domestic' and 'foreign' subject matter.

Finally, we would like to note that in the past the BBC has shown considerable willingness to engage in dialogue on the matters noted above. IBT has been given the opportunity to present our research results to senior managers.

Following that dialogue the BBC is engaged in a series of high-level seminars led by Jana Bennett, the Director of BBC Vision, designed to look at the vast and rapid changes occurring in developing countries and the way in which the developing and developed world are increasingly interconnected. The seminars also engage creative and commissioning staff in brainstorming new ideas for broadcast programmes.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with the BBC Trustees and the team managing this consultation to discuss the points we make in our submission further.

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If you would prefer that all or part of your response is treated as confidential, please complete the confidentiality section below.

What do you want the BBC Trust to keep confidential? NOTHING

Name/ Organisation Sophie Chalk, IBT
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The BBC complies with the Data Protection Act 1998. For more information on BBC's Privacy Policy please refer to <http://www.bbc.co.uk/privacy/>. The BBC is listed as a public body in Part VI of Schedule 1 to the Freedom of Information Act 2000; this means that, subject to certain restrictions, the BBC may be required to disclose information it holds to individuals and organisations making a valid request to be supplied with that information under the Act. If you have requested that all or part of your response should be kept confidential, the BBC will take reasonable steps to maintain confidentiality of that information if a request for its disclosure is received under the Act. Please note, however, that in the event the BBC is able to withhold information under the Act, this decision may be overturned by the Information Commissioner, the Information Tribunal or the courts. Please note that we may still refer to the contents of responses in general terms, without disclosing specific information that is confidential. We will exercise due regard to the confidentiality of information supplied.

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DECLARATION

I confirm that the information I have submitted is a formal consultation response. It can be published in full on the BBC Trust's website, unless otherwise specified, and I authorise the BBC Trust to make use of the information in this response to meet its legal requirements. If I have sent my response by email, the BBC can disregard any standard e-mail text about not disclosing email contents and attachments.

Name Signed (if hard copy) Sophie Chalk