



Submission to the BBC Trust Review of Network Music Radio

We welcome the opportunity for the Radio Independents Group (RIG) to respond to the BBC Trust's service review of network music radio.

The Independent Audio-Led Production Sector

As the Trust will be aware, audio-led independent producers provide a substantial proportion of content on network music radio stations:

| Station | % of eligible hours commissioned from independent producers |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Radio 1 | 17% |
| Radio 2 | 34% |
| Radio 3 | 19% |
| Radio 1Xtra | 18.5% |
| 6 Music | 25% |
| Asian Network | 12% |

Source: BBC Annual Report: Performance against public commitments 2013/14

Moreover independent production companies are responsible for many of the BBC's most distinctive programmes. In particular, the independent production sector is well-known for its specialist music production, and landmark music-based events. In the music programme category of the 2014 Radio Academy Awards, the Gold Award was awarded to *The Jamie Cullum Show* on Radio 2, produced by Folded Wing; with the Silver going to epic 50 part series *The People's Songs* on Radio 2, produced by Smooth Operations, based in Oldham. More recently, TBI Media conceived, developed and produced BBC Radio 2's *'Friday Night is Music Night presents D-Day 70 Years On'*, the UK's largest live concert to commemorate the 70th anniversary of D-Day. This was true event broadcasting, with a concert filmed at the Albert Hall and broadcast to cinemas around the UK.

Our comments are directed at four main concerns voiced by our members – these involve distinctiveness, specialist genres, live events, and the sustainability of budget levels.

Distinctiveness

Common to the stated objectives of the BBC's music radio stations is to offer a specifically-defined distinctive service – in the case of Radios 1 and 2 they also are required to appeal to a broad audience.

In our view, reaching a broad audience requires an approach that makes sure that there is at some point in the schedule something for everyone (within the station's target audience), rather than necessarily keeping that audience at a high level all of the time.

In terms of overall distinctiveness, what makes a radio station more distinctive is the use of new formats, approaches, sound design and talent, ideas stories and perspectives. As independent production companies, RIG's members are operating beyond the BBC, working with commercial radio, corporate and public organisations, and with networks and other clients in other countries. Thus they can bring back to the BBC all of those elements which can add to a distinctive feel for a network such as Radio 1 or Radio 2.

We respect the boundaries of this current review, in that it does not intend to examine closely the issues around content supply, but would point out that increased competition for ideas would bring significant benefits to licence fee payers, and would suggest that opening up entire networks or areas of network music radio – for example, specialist music production, or a digital network - to full competition, would represent a bold and progressive step in areas where independent producers already have a strong track record of high-quality provision.

In addition, the presence of indie radio production companies all around the UK constitutes an effective way of achieving greater representation of the UK nations and regions on the BBC's services, something which has been highlighted following the referendum on Scottish independence.

RIG therefore greatly welcomes Tony Hall's 'Compete or Compare' philosophy, and is keen to see this applied to BBC Radio.

We will expand on these areas more fully in our submission to the Trust's forthcoming review of television, radio and online content supply.

Specialist Music Genres

The BBC is historically a great supporter of a wide range of musical genres. For example Radio 3 has a responsibility to deliver jazz and world music in addition to classical. Indies provide distinctive programming in these areas which is largely uncatered for elsewhere.

RIG is always encouraging the commercial sector to be bolder in terms of innovation and scheduling, however there are cases where there are minority genres which it is important the BBC supports. On this note, we are concerned that the hiatus caused by the absence of a dedicated controller for Radio 3 has led to a situation where there is concern for the future of some of Radio 3's jazz programming, as well as its world music content.

We would ask the Trust as a matter of urgency to discuss this with the new Radio 3 controller when they take up their post, to ensure that there is no further reduction in jazz or world music scheduling.

We would hope that the lessons learnt from the proposed closure of 6 Music would help make sure that the BBC does not in future forget that it is partly there to cater for specialist music genres both in instances where there is market failure, and providing healthy creative competition to commercial providers.

Live Events

There is a need for the BBC to continue to support live events, helping capture key moments in music and speech and broadcast them to a wide audience.

Again independent producers are involved in such productions, and we have a concern that there may be moves to curtail some live event coverage. If being done on cost grounds we would argue that as experts in providing high-quality content to a set budget, our sector can offer expert guidance on how the BBC can make its money go further in this and other respects.

Budgets

Relevant to all of the above is the ability for the BBC Radio to maintain the quality and overall range of its radio services.

To ensure the BBC is continuing to provide the best value for money, indie radio producers are also keen to share their expertise in producing high-quality distinctive content to a clearly-defined budget. The BBC Executive is currently discussing with RIG its intention to undertake a benchmarking exercise and we will be looking to engage with them on this, provided we are satisfied that it will be transparent in taking full account of all of the BBC's overheads. Having a clear understanding of its own costs will help the BBC be able to better determine where efficiencies can be gained without the need to simply cut or reduce services, which is clearly damaging to the experience of the licence fee payer.

Whilst there is we feel room for greater efficiency within BBC production, this does not belie the fact that RIG is concerned that recent cuts to BBC budgets threaten high quality and distinctive productions and services.

RIG's members cite examples where rates charged for services provided by the BBC to independent producers have increased substantially (in one, example, by 25%), while programme budgets remain frozen. This has a clear and immediate impact on programme-making.

It is of general concern that the BBC management does not at times seem to recognise the huge impact and reach its own radio services have, simply instead looking at its bottom line and prioritising it accordingly. Specifically, our opinion is that Delivering Quality First did not take sufficient note of the fact that with BBC Radio starting from the lower base in terms of budget, the effect of the cuts are disproportionately affecting radio budgets, including for music services.

This is a mistaken attitude that RIG is seeking to challenge, and we would like to see the BBC Trust ensure that the BBC Executive is treating the BBC Radio budget by its own merits, rather than subjecting it to further uniformly-applied BBC cuts.