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Thematic Review of Portrayal and Representation

Terms of Reference

Purpose

The subject agreed by the BBC Board for the third in its cycle of independent thematic reviews of content is a study of how accurately and authentically the BBC portrays and represents the different communities in the UK across its output.

The Board notes that, as a universally funded public broadcaster, the BBC must reflect the lives of the people of the United Kingdom and be aware of changes taking place among them. How this is achieved can be a significant factor in determining overall public approval of the BBC and perceptions of BBC impartiality. The Board further notes that it is vital to know how well BBC content is perceived to deliver on these responsibilities across audience groups and to be able to take appropriate action, where necessary.

Scope

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In addition, an examination of existing audience research will aid the joint leaders of the Review in refining and prioritising what they look at and identifying gaps in portrayal and representation.

The methodologies to be used will include:

External stakeholder engagement. As previous thematic reviews have demonstrated, the external consultation provides an important opportunity to engage with stakeholders and commentators who properly challenge the BBC about its representation of different communities. The external consultation is expected to include significant players in the creative industries who will provide perspectives on how ideas, stories and performers are selected and developed. They will also give views on the challenge of effectively and creatively representing a wide range of perspectives in these genres.

Audience research. The Review will consider existing research and will commission new research, as appropriate, to provide a wide understanding of audience perspectives on portrayal and representation.

Internal stakeholder input. The reviewers expect to interview principal BBC decision makers, including commissioners and channel/homepage editors, about their choices on portrayal and representation and what informs them, how these individual decisions aggregate and to what extent outcomes are appraised and used in subsequent decision-making.

Content analysis. Over the specified period, the joint leaders of the Review will assess the reality of the weekly/monthly BBC portfolio of content in terms of representation and portrayal.

Complaints. The joint leaders of the Review will consider relevant complaints about the subject matter of this Review for the specified period, together with the BBC's response.

Assessment criteria

As set out above, the Review will examine the range of portrayal and representation across the BBC's services and content over the specified period and evaluate the effectiveness of that portrayal through case studies. The Review will identify the more strategic challenges the BBC faces in delivering on this key priority and, where appropriate, make recommendations to address them.

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- how well the BBC represents audience groups across its content in terms of both the quantity and quality of portrayal (including subject matter and presentation) and representation.
- how the BBC seeks to deliver the portrayal and representation required by the fourth public purpose of the Charter* through, for example, its commissioning.
- how well the BBC, in promoting its content and services to audiences, authentically portrays and represents them.

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