

## **THE BBC TRUST'S REVIEW OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN**

### **Submission from the Audience Council England**

#### **Section I: Summary**

In order to develop a submission to the BBC Trust's review of services for children, the Audience Council England asked members of its twelve regional panels for their views on CBeebies and CBBC.

Members felt that CBeebies and CBBC delivered high quality programmes, largely made in the UK, for a range of children. They considered the BBC to be the most trusted broadcaster and were therefore confident that the content would be suitable for the target age range. This meant that they were the channels of choice for parents, if not always for children.

The range of programmes on the channels was considered to be very good, although members felt that CBBC tended to focus more on entertainment than educational content, and perhaps there was room for more factual programmes, whereas on CBeebies almost all the programmes had an educational element. Members considered the range of programmes to be a key factor in differentiating the BBC's children's channels from others. Commercial channels were considered to have some good programmes, but the overall mix was much stronger on the BBC.

While it was acknowledged that it was difficult to provide programmes for all children within the target age ranges it was felt that both channels were better at serving the younger children. This was considered a particular problem for children around 10 years and over – as there were no BBC programmes specifically aimed at early/mid teens. It was felt that this could explain why some older children preferred commercial broadcasters such as Disney or Nickelodeon.

Most members understood the rationale for removing children's services from BBC One and BBC Two following digital switchover. However, they felt strongly that this should not send out a message, either externally or inside the BBC, that children's programmes were no longer important or lead to a reduction in the budget for these services. It was noted that some of the more family friendly programming from CBBC could be shown on BBC One or BBC Two.

Members felt that CBBC and CBeebies were largely successful in representing a diverse UK but that more could be done particular to reflect different geographic areas or socio-economic groups.

## **Section 2: Main Report**

### **I. Introduction**

The Audience Council England is an advisory body of the BBC Trust. Its role is to provide the Trust with insights on the views, needs and interests of audiences in England. In order to do this it is supported by a network of panels, one in each of the BBC's broadcasting regions in England.

To provide insight to the Trust during the development stage of the review of services for children, the Audience Council invited panel members who used CBeebies or CBBC to complete online questionnaires and take part in telephone conferences. Around 40 members gave their views which were used by the Trust's project team when developing the terms of reference for the review.

### **2. Key Themes**

#### **(a) Quality and range of programmes**

Members considered that CBBC and CBeebies provided high quality programmes which set the benchmark for children's broadcasting in the UK. It was acknowledged that not all programmes had the same production values, though this was not considered particularly problematic as the key consideration should be ensuring that the content was educational, entertaining and stimulating.

#### **I. CBeebies**

Most respondents welcomed the wide range of programmes though some wondered whether there was too much choice as the number of programmes made it difficult for parents to be across the whole schedule and some good programmes may therefore get missed. Members felt that the balance between established and new programmes was right. They believed that the programmes had clear identities and strong recurring characters which provided familiarity and comfort for children, and allowed the programmes to cover a wide range of new topics. They also noted that most of the programmes were made for the channel rather than being bought from overseas broadcasters.

Members felt the programmes were structured to assist in child development. They mentioned the strength of storytelling within programmes, with good scripts and plots, and characters which were well defined and aimed at the target audience. Learning through stimulation and fun was considered to be a key strength of the channel, with almost all programmes having a strong educational element. Members felt that the channel explored curricular subjects in an entertaining and enjoyable way. Members noted that television should not replace experiential learning, but provide the building blocks to assist parents and guardians.

CBeebies presenters were considered to be personable, engaging and intelligent without patronising younger children, while being entertaining for adults who may be watching with

children. The presenters were also seen to encourage interaction between children and adults.

A wide variety of programmes were praised including:

- *Alphablocks* – develop language skills using letters and sounds
- *Andy's Wild Adventures* – basic natural history
- *Baby Jake* - particularly helpful for children with baby siblings
- *Bedtime Stories* – good range of short stories
- *Get Well Soon* – reassuring to children about everyday health issues
- *I Can Cook* – basic recipes but also explains where food comes from
- *The Lingo Show* – introduces children to languages
- *Mr Bloom's Nursery* – helps children learn about nature, and encourages participation
- *Mister Maker* – encourages arts and crafts
- *My Story* – encourages young children to investigate their family history
- *Nina and the Neurons* – introduction to basic science
- *Numberjacks* – numeracy skills in a setting which is enjoyable to young children
- *Numtums* – short, action packed and helps very young children learn about numbers
- *Octonauts* - very engaging and educational
- *Show Me, Show Me* – good storytelling, use of words and numbers
- *Something Special* – very inclusive, particularly good on portrayal of disability
- *Tree Fu Tom* – good storytelling, good use of narrative arc
- *Waybuloo* – good mix of animation and real children
- *Wooly and Tig* – helps prepare children for different experiences and behaviors
- *ZingZillas* – introduces children to different types of music and instruments

Some members believed that there could be more imaginative scheduling, and programmes could be moved to different slots to help adults discover new programmes, though others felt that children liked the familiarity of knowing when a programme would be broadcast.

Members felt that the length of a programme was important and believed that shorter programmes worked best. A number of respondents commented that *In the Night Garden* felt too long, particularly for younger children.

Whilst individual storytelling programmes were welcomed, some respondents said they would welcome more programmes with an on-going narrative arc such as *Tree Fu Tom*.

## 2. CBBC

Respondents believed there was a wide range of programmes on the channel in a variety of genres including drama, factual and entertainment allowing children to pick and choose what they wanted to watch. This was particularly important on CBBC given the difference in developmental stages across the target age range of 6-12.

There was a belief that the programmes skewed towards entertainment rather than education with some respondents believing that there could be more factual based programmes. Respondents, however, felt that this didn't need to be at the expense of being

entertaining. *Horrible Histories* was cited as a good example of a mixed genre programme which was both educational and entertaining. It was felt that the BBC was particularly strong at this type of programming.

Programmes which were praised included:

- *Horrible Histories* – excellent mix of education and entertainment
- *The Sarah Jane Adventures* – good drama for children and family viewing
- *Blue Peter* – good wide ranging magazine programme
- *Tracey Beaker/The Dumping Ground* – drama addressing issues of relevance for children
- *Newsround* – excellent journalism for children
- *Deadly 60* – makes natural history interesting and relevant
- *Leonardo* – good mix of history, culture and drama
- *Wolfblood* – excellent programme for older children
- *Wizards versus Aliens* – another excellent drama for older children

## **(b) Serving all target audience**

Panel members felt that both CBeebies and CBBC tended to serve the younger end of the target audience better than older children.

Respondents considered that CBeebies served younger, pre-school, children better than those between 4-6 years old. While members felt that between CBeebies and CBBC there was a good mix of programming for young children, perhaps more could be done to facilitate the move from CBeebies to CBBC, such as more cross-promotion and signposting, or even scheduling some programmes on both channels. Members acknowledged that the age at which a child moved from CBeebies to CBBC was not absolute, rather it was dependent on the development of the individual child, and ultimately parents or guardians must make the decision.

It was generally felt that CBBC served younger children better than those aged 10-12. Programmes targeting pre-teen children, such as *Tracey Beaker* and *Wolfblood*, were considered high quality, however there could be more of these types of programme. It was felt that this could explain why older children preferred other broadcasters, such as Disney Channel or Nick. These channels were considered 'cooler', with strong brands and programmes more explicitly aimed at young teens. Respondents acknowledged the difficulty in providing programmes for the entire 6-12 age range, given the widely differing needs.

Some members felt that the target age of the channels should perhaps be changed so that CBeebies focussed on 2-4 year olds, and CBBC on 5-10.

Respondents noted that there seemed little on the BBC for children who had outgrown CBBC. They stressed the need for high quality, engaging programming targeted at early and mid-teens, either on a dedicated channel, perhaps using the early part of BBC Three, but more likely on BBC One or Two. Members felt teenagers were most likely to be watching television between 7-9pm and at present there seemed very little which would interest them.

### **(c) Reflecting the UK's diverse population**

Respondents felt that it was very important for CBeebies to provide young viewers with a wide range of different experiences and cultures. Members noted that some children are brought up in areas or communities that are not particularly diverse and therefore it is important that BBC reflects contemporary Britain. It was felt that CBeebies did reflect children from a variety of cultures, particularly with regard to ethnicity, and was also successful in portraying disability. There was, however, a feeling that there were too many southern, middle class characters and presenters, and more could be done to reflect the different parts of the UK and a wider variety of accents used.

Respondents felt that while CBBC did an adequate job in reflecting the diversity of the UK, more could be done, particularly given that many children will be used to the more diverse representation on CBeebies. Again, there were calls for better regional representation and a wider variety of voices and accents.

### **(d) Website**

Those respondents who used the CBeebies website felt that it was high quality, worked well with the television content, and both entertained and educated children, often serving as a child's introduction to the internet. The use of video and audio navigation rather than text was praised, as was the use of familiar on screen presenters, and the site's thematic layout. It was felt that the site did not just supplement the programmes but offered something new.

A number of respondents mentioned the need to develop the online offering so that it worked across a variety of devices including computers, tablets and mobiles and as apps.

Most respondents felt that the CBBC website was attractive and easy to navigate, providing informative and entertaining content. In particular they trusted the BBC to provide a safe environment which children could use unsupervised. *Newsround* was praised for having close links between the programme and the website, but it was felt that for some other programmes these links could be strengthened.

Very few members had previously been aware of the 'grown ups' section of the CBeebies site, though having now discovered it suggested it should have more publicity including a more prominent position on the CBeebies site. Those who did use it felt it was particularly useful in helping them understand the aims and target age for the programmes. It was also suggested that there could be links to other parts of the BBC site, such as the learning and education sections. Again respondents mentioned the need to develop the content for tablets and mobiles.

### **(e) Removal of children's programmes from BBC One and BBC Two**

Most respondents understood the decision to remove CBeebies and CBBC from BBC One and BBC Two believing that in a multi-channel digital age this was appropriate, as long as they remained free to air and available to all. There was, however, some concern that this could be seen as marginalising and devaluing the role of children's television and may lead to

cost cutting, which would be inappropriate given the importance of children's programmes. There was also some concern about the loss of serendipitous moments when children and adults stumbled upon things together. It was noted that although there was some family friendly programming on BBC One such as *Merlin* and *Dr Who*, some of the current CBBC programmes could also transfer to BBC One, even if not branded as children's programmes. These include *Horrible Histories*, *Tracey Beaker*, *Blue Peter*, *Deadly 60* and *Wolfblood*.

Members also stressed the need to publicise CBeebies and CBBC on the main BBC channels, particularly given the strong brands of some commercial channels.

#### **(f) Comparison to other broadcasters**

Respondents preferred CBeebies to alternative children's channels for two main reasons. Firstly, although there were good individual programmes on some of the other channels (Channel 5 Milkshake, Disney and Nick Jnr), overall CBeebies was considered to be of a constantly higher standard of quality and content, with wider range and more educational focus. Other broadcasters had a far greater number of imported programmes and cartoons. Secondly, all respondents were concerned about commercial breaks and advertising on the other channels – which often meant that they felt unable to leave children unsupervised while watching these channels. Whereas they considered that they could trust the BBC not to have inappropriate content on the CBeebies channel. They also felt that some of the other channels had strong commercial brands which often seemed to be more important than the programming.

This was echoed when discussing CBBC where parents said that they preferred their children to watch the channel than commercial offerings because the programming had a more educational feel to it, mainly made mainly in the UK rather than imported, and there were no commercial breaks. However, they acknowledged that given the choice their older children would probably prefer to watch commercial channels, which were considered more grown up.