

NORTH WEST REGIONAL AUDIENCE COUNCIL

Thursday 11 May 2011, New Broadcasting House, BBC Manchester

Present:

Bruce Thomas RAC Chair and ACE Member
Andrew Armstrong
Becky Rowe
Danny Lee
Isabel Machado-Williams
Jan Szladowski
John Garvey
Naveed Ahmad
Matt Sumners
Rachael Mitchinson
Rita Flanagan
Simon Williams
Surinder Singh Jolly

Aziz Rashid HRLP BBC North West
Aaqil Ahmed BBC Head of Religion and Ethics
Carol Webster Public Accountability Manager, England

Apologies:

Alvin Kofi
Faye Christiansen
Jim Metcalf

1. Welcome and introductions

The chair welcomed members to the meeting, especially the new members attending their first meeting and Aaqil Ahmed, BBC Head of Religion and Ethics.

2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

DL asked for progress on the ACE Radio Five Live consultation. The PAM explained that this was being led by the Chair of the North East and Cumbria RAC, who would be contacting all those who had volunteered to take part.

3. Aaqil Ahmed - Head of Religion and Ethics

The chair welcomed Aaqil Ahmed to the meeting. AA apologised for not being able to attend a meeting sooner. He explained that his role as Head of Religion and Ethics was a pan-BBC job. He is also Commissioning Editor for TV and Head of in-house production based in Manchester. He offers advice on all output including soaps such as *Eastenders*. He is responsible for commissioning within in the BBC including BBC Belfast and BBC Arts and some of the independents including the *Big Questions*. He also looks after 550 hours of output a year on radio as head of the in-house department, including *Thought for the Day*, *Choral Evensong* and *The Moral Maze*, each of which had their own commissioning editor. He invited questions from members.

When asked about programmes for a multicultural UK that would cover minority groups and religions, he said he and his team had worked hard at this and that his aim was to make this mainstream rather than have special programmes. He explained that programmes such as *The Big Questions* were multicultural and each programme had a diverse expert.

He told members of planned programmes including a series on Buddhism, and the programme with Rageh Omar on Islam. He said that he was building up a library to ensure that all faiths and non-faiths were covered saying that this was an evolution and a slow process. He said that he has tried to make a multicultural team and has kept space to bring in people with specialist knowledge. He said that his aim was to make religion and ethics mainstream and peak-time.

There followed a comments, question and answer session.

SSJ said that the Vaisaikhī programme had been appreciated by the community.

NA felt that representation of people from Burnley was usually negative. In addition, when representatives of the Muslim community were invited to appear on programmes such as *The Big Questions*, they would often be the 'usual suspects'. She accepted that this could apply to other communities.

AA said that this was a slow process and the biggest problem was the speakers available at the time. He said that on occasion people who are/can be distasteful, had to be invited as they had a voice and a viewpoint, and a balance had to be struck. He said that in the North West some speakers had come through Mosaic*.

JS asked why the Beatification of Pope John Paul II, which took place at the same time as the Royal Wedding, had not been covered. He said a number of Poles in his network had questioned this, as they wanted to know more about what was happening in Rome and Europe.

AA said that there had been blanket coverage of the Pope's visit to England at the end of 2010 and the beatification of Cardinal Newman, and that it had to be a question of balance.

RF acknowledged that AA had been invited to attend the meeting in 2011 as licence fee payers in her network had asked why there was not coverage of Christian festivals on Good Friday. She agreed that things had moved on and this had been addressed.

AA said that Easter and Christmas were important events in the Christian calendar that should be and were covered.

BR said she had enjoyed the Anne Widdicome programme, which was very good.

JS said that thought for the day was brilliant and asked that it was not changed.

4. Programme & service review

4.1 Royal Wedding: BBC coverage

Pre- event: Some members were bored by the build up and said that this put them off watching on the day.

On the day: There was a difference of opinion among members regarding the presenters with some saying there was a good mix, others saying there were too many. Overall members felt the mix had something for everyone, with Fearne Cotton appealing to the younger audience. Most felt that this was a very British event that brought communities together. The North West Tonight coverage of local events, such as the street party in Wigan, was liked by members, which brought a local perspective to a national and international event. One member who was travelling from Heathrow on the day reported everything coming to a standstill by the kiss! Some members, who had not been able to watch live, watched later on iPlayer. The coverage in Westminster Abbey was commented on, saying that this added to the sense of occasion.

Post wedding: members generally liked the live coverage, but got bored with the repeats.

4.2 Local Radio Service Licence

Sport: The local radio stations covered sports well (Radio Merseyside – excellent coverage and popular). It was felt that the commentaries were biased towards the local team (it was explained that this was allowed!). The local stations were valued for their sports coverage in general and had good relationships with the local clubs. Radio Manchester tried to give equal coverage of the two clubs with the programmes *Blue Tuesday* and *Red Wednesday*. For most members local radio is their second choice for sports coverage (after Sky and TV in general). One member had listened to the local radio coverage while watching TV with the mute on as they found the commentary more compelling. Another member accessed the radio commentary via the Red Button. Members said they had not heard much on other sports except rugby league and cricket, and a number asked why Altrincham Ice Hockey team was not covered!

Faith: Members reported that they hadn't seen any programme specifically covering faith – one member had looked at the schedules and could not find any faith related programmes. No one said they would tune in for faith programmes. Some members had noted faith issues covered in some programmes if it was a topic of the day. A Radio Lancashire listener recalled some coverage of faith on the *Indus* programme.

Minority and Specialist Programmes: The shared programme *Indus* on Radio Manchester and Radio Lancashire was the only programme members were aware of for minority groups. Radio Merseyside had a Saturday night programme aimed at the Local Black Community. One member from the Asian community felt that specialist programmes for this community was sometimes seen as 'segregation'. Members felt that minority communities looked elsewhere for their radio input. Peace FM in Manchester catered specifically for the Caribbean community and the Polish community got their input online. Most members were aware of the BBC Introducing programmes on all three stations.

Social Media: Members heard mention of social media on the radio constantly and felt that the listener should be aware as a result. They felt that listeners were encouraged to interact using social media, and that it was good that the BBC was moving with the times.

It was noted that the only radio station to have a defined number of hours of output for the Asian community was Radio Lancashire with 10 hours per week. Members felt that this was an anomaly as there were other areas in the UK with higher Asian population. They wanted to know how this number was arrived at and if it was relevant. The meeting agreed that this should be taken to ACE as a burning issue.

Action: CW/BT

4.3 Local Radio Link Reports: the link members added to their reports, which members had received with their meeting packs.

BBC Radio Manchester: the link member said that the coverage of the Royal Wedding had been comprehensive and good.

BBC Radio Merseyside: the link member reported strong the feeling on Merseyside on the proposal to share programmes. Sharing had been tried in the 1990's and hadn't worked, and the feeling amongst network members was that they didn't want to share. The link member had raised this at ACE and it had been included in the Chairs introduction to the RAC's Annual Report.

The HRLP said that a number of options were being considered including sharing between 20 of the 40 local radio stations, but no final decisions had been made.

5. Reports

5.1 Head of Region's report

The HRLP added to his report, and gave an update on DQF.

There had been a number of programmes on the elections, and Arif Ansara, the political editor had done a good job, which had been recognised.

A member asked about an item on *NW Tonight* about Jeremy Clarkson erecting a fence around his house on the Isle of Man that stopped people accessing a footpath. This had subsequently been torn down by 'vandals'. He felt that the piece was taking the side of Jeremy Clarkson against that of walkers and ramblers. The HRLP explained that the piece was challenging the issue. The member from the Isle of Man explained that this was an issue that had been in dispute for 3 years, had been in court, and was still in dispute. She said that the fence had been erected to stop people looking into the Clarkson home, and that the footpath was still accessible.

The story of the cosmetic doctor whose patient had died was questioned by a member. He wondered whether this would have been covered if the person had not been the wife of a footballer as it had been three years since the death. AR said that it was a news story as the inquest following her death was taking place at the time. Investigations showed that doctor was still practicing in Sweden. It was brought to the attention of the Swedish authorities that this man had been responsible for a death and was still practising.

The story of the girl who died in a gliding accident was felt by one member to have been reported inaccurately. He felt that the report did not reflect that it was as a result of pilot error not the glider. The HRLP said that the report would reflect what the family said as well as the technical organisation (CAA).

5.2 English Regions draft objectives and Local Radio Performance: the Chair explained that these have been set by David Holdsworth (Controller English Regions) and are the objectives set for the Regions for the coming year.

The chair asked members to forward any comments to CW

Action All

5.3 Chair's Report

Audience Council England (January draft minutes)

The Chair gave highlights from the ACE meeting he attended in London on 18/19 April, which include Helen Boaden, Director BBC News who was the dinner guests on April 18; the minutes would be sent to members. He reported that David Holdsworth wanted to let members know how influential they had been to *Late Kick Off* being given a fixed time slot.

He informed the meeting that there had been extensive discussion around DAB (item 5.1 in the ACE minutes) and that Alix Pryde, Director BBC Distribution had attended the meeting and there had been further discussion (item 7.1 ACE minutes). Concerns raised echoed the RAC meeting summaries and included the cost to the consumer; a lack of evidenced research into DAB; incompatibility with car radios; a view that FM quality was superior; signal and reception problems; and high battery consumption.

6. Trust business & feedback

6.1 BBC Trust Work-plan 2011/12

The Chair explained that the Trust's work-plan for the new financial year had been published. It set out the focus of the Trust's work and included the audience priorities identified by the Audience Councils. The most important element this year was the delivery of the new BBC strategy *Putting Quality First* within the licence fee settlement.

6.2 BBC Trust appointments: Chairman and Vice-Chairman

Members were reminded that Lord Patten of Barnes had taken up the post of BBC Trust Chair on 11 May, and that Diane Coyle as Vice Chair.

7. Outreach

CW updated members on plans for the June outreach that would look at BBC Local Radio. The proposal was to hold two outreach events for the region. After some discussion it was agreed that three events would take place one for each of the three local stations.

8. Burning issues – *Delivering the purposes and matters of trust*

It was agreed to take to ACE the issue of Radio Lancashire having to deliver 500 hours of output for the Asian community.

Action: BT

9. Any other Business

One member said that he was impressed by the high quality of drama so far this year; others supported this view.

Members wanted to know what was happening with monitoring HD as some had volunteered to take part in this. CW said that more information should be going out to those who had volunteered in due course.

10. Date of next meeting:

16 June 2011 – Outreach – 6pm Manchester. Dates for Liverpool and Blackburn to be agreed.

* Mosaic was founded by HRH The Prince of Wales in November 2007 to challenge the growing concern around the issues facing young Muslims living in deprived areas of Britain.

Endnote

[We aim to make as much of the minutes available as possible. However, there will be times when sections of the minutes will be withheld from publication. These will be kept to a minimum and clearly marked.]