

Graham Hughes

Ofcom oversight of BBC Radio.

You can't help but feel that Ofcom is about to be caught in crossfire when it comes to the regulation of the BBC.

Tony Hall is right when he says the BBC should modernise but will every licence payer get value for money in the future?

BBC Radio One is adapting while Radio Two is producing some amazing specialist shows.

At the other extreme **BBC Local Radio** is losing its way, with declining listening as well. How does Ofcom propose to regulate this service? The BBC is very good at ticking boxes but this "worthiness" is taking its toll. For example, the value and impact of social action broadcasting is declining as listenership declines and the audience gets older (70 is the new norm for the dedicated listener while its "younger" listeners (the under 65s) tune in less and less.

The BBC has a fantastic range of services but the one aimed at 50-69 year olds is in a poor way and is facing yet even more cutbacks in England. Baby Boomers have not taken to BBC LR in the way predicted and within ten years this super-group will start dropping off its perch. When one senior manager is reported to have recently said he "hoped" listeners would come back you can only despair.

So while Ofcom will rightly oversee BBC services how does the regulator propose to keep a balance of targeted, and attention grabbing, output across all ages and backgrounds, particularly on radio, away from London? It won't come from lists.

Is poor oversight going allow a merger of LR stations to save money when, for example, previous research shows that local audiences preferred national news to regional output (after local first)?

The 20th Century model of output and staffing needs more than a rethink. BBC LR needs to modernise and adapt to new audiences intelligently - a future, not a death of a thousand cuts.

Ofcom needs to be part of that new intelligent oversight - for the sake of the audience.

[Since 2001 BBC LR hours (England) have halved despite Baby Boomers coming into the target audience range. In comparison BBC Radio 2 has increased its listening hours by over a quarter in the same time period).Entertained, informed not preached at!]

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