

Dr Martin Scott

Jacque Hughes

Ofcom

Riverside House

2a Southwark Bridge Road,

SE1 9HA

Re: BBC performance consultation

Dear Ms Hughes,

I am writing in response to the Ofcom consultation on Holding the BBC to Account for the Delivery of its Mission and Public Purposes.

I am a Senior Lecturer in Media and International Development at the University of East Anglia (UEA), and am writing to express my strong support for the IBT proposal that the amount of non-news international content should be recorded each year as a measure of the BBC's performance.

I am well placed to comment on this issue as I have led three separate research projects that have measured the amount of non-news international content on the BBC and other UK broadcasters. The results of these projects were published in three different reports: *Reflecting a Changing World?* (2015), *Outside the Box* (2011) and *Screening the World* (2008). In addition, I have conducted numerous other studies of international news and non-news content as well as studies of audience responses to this content (see Scott, 2015; 2014a; 2014b; 2013; 2009).

These three particular research projects have helped to monitor the changing quantity and nature of international programming over time – and to demonstrate the distinctive role of the BBC. For example, the most recent research showed that the BBC broadcast half of all non-news international programming on UK television in 2015. It also revealed that BBC2 had replaced Channel 4 as the most international TV channel and that its content was more likely focus on conflict, disaster, development, environment and human rights, compared to Channel 4, which was dominated by human interest programming. Collectively, all three research projects have revealed a general decline, over time, in the amount of new non-news international programming broadcast by Channel 4.

This research also demonstrates that producing a consistent and accurate measure of the amount of international factual programming is possible. The methodology for these studies has been refined over time and now allows us to offer an accurate picture of the state of international factual programming in the UK. Indeed, it is my understanding that Ofcom used to tag non-news international content and could do so again relatively easily.

However, it is worth noting that this research has so far only been conducted on an ad hoc basis. If the BBC is to be held accountable to the delivery of its public purposes, then the monitoring of non-news international content needs to be formalised.

Purpose 1 in the new charter requires the BBC to broadcast current affairs and factual programming to build people's understanding of all parts of the UK and the wider world. If international content is

not measured, we will not be able to adequately assess whether the BBC is achieving this objective. Channel 4 already measures the amount of non-news international content it broadcasts each year to track delivery of its remit. There is every reason for the BBC to do the same.

The importance of enforcing an international public purpose

Existing research suggests that the enforcement of a public service remit is one of the few ways of ensuring that international issues are covered in detail. For example, based on a comparative analysis of the international coverage within thirteen different countries, Chan and Lee (2013) found that, compared with commercial broadcasters, public service broadcasters were significantly more likely to include characteristics of 'analytical depth'.

Similarly, I am currently leading an AHRC-funded research project that is mapping the state of media coverage of humanitarian crises (see www.humanitarian-journalism.net). Our results show that regularly producing original content about humanitarian issues is generally not commercially viable. As a result, this is often only done by organisations with a strong commitment to public service values. In the US, the most frequent producers of original coverage about humanitarian actors and events on television and radio are NPR and PBS. In the UK, it is the BBC. In Australia, it is SBS. Put simply, ensuring that the BBC is held accountable to its international purpose will help to ensure that important but un-profitable international issues are adequately addressed.

The importance of non-news international content

It is also worth noting that I have published a number of academic studies that have illustrated the importance of broadcasters producing international content across a range of genres – not just news. For example, the results of one, large-scale audience study showed that non-news factual television programming offers audiences a more proximate, active and complex experience of distant suffering than television news (Scott 2015). In another study, I presented evidence to suggest that audiences were more likely to talk about celebrity-led travel/adventure programming as being more 'authentic': involving seemingly more proximate and active encounters with distant others (Scott 2014a).

Finally, I have shown that the format of some reality-television style programmes set in 'other' countries, actively lend themselves to providing more emotional, egalitarian and humanised experiences of distant others (Scott 2013). Indeed, I concluded that particular article by suggesting that coverage of the serious, the sensible, and the suffering is not the only kind of international content that matters (Scott 2013).

In summary, I hope that you will give serious consideration to the IBT proposal to include a measurement of the volume of new non-news international factual content produced by the BBC.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. P. Scott". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Dr Martin Scott

Senior Lecturer in Media and International Development

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