

Submission to the Ofcom consultation on the
thematic review of representation and
portrayal on the BBC

pact.

March 2018

Introduction

1. Pact is the UK trade association which represents and promotes the commercial interests of independent feature film, television, digital, children's and animation media companies.
2. The UK independent television sector is one of the biggest in the world. Independent television sector revenues have grown to around £2.5 billion in 2016 in the last year largely driven by a growth in international sales.¹
3. In 2016, the BBC spent £433 million on commissions from UK external producers.² In our recent census we found the BBC spent the highest proportion of its external commissioning budget on smaller producers with a turnover of less than £10m.³
4. Pact recognises the important role that the BBC plays in the UK television marketplace and how it nurtures and adds to the finely balanced TV production ecology across the UK. We are pleased with the new charter whereby the license fee has been secured for another 11 years with further competition opening up commissioning. The BBC is a positive experimenter in the marketplace and this is often driven by the innovative content which it commissions from independent production companies.
5. Pact supports the specific quotas agreed under the BBC service licence agreement for each of the nations and English regions. We also welcome the additional local spend announced for the BBC in Wales, Northern Ireland and BBC Scotland including the new channel in Scotland. This, along with the opening out of BBC local and network opportunities to competition, will provide more opportunities for production companies based out of London to represent voices and communities from around the UK.
6. Our main recommendation to this review is to encourage the BBC to commission in a way that drives both creativity and scale in companies out of London. This will ensure that Indies are able to build sustainable companies of scale through both authentically reflecting local communities and stories whilst producing content that appeals to a UK audience. Authentic stories can perform well internationally too.
7. For further information, please contact Pact's Director of Nations and Regions, [REDACTED].

¹ Pact Financial Census and Survey 2017 (Oliver and Ohlbaum Associates for Pact)

² BBC Annual Report 2016/17

³ Pact Financial Census and Survey 2017 (Oliver and Ohlbaum Associates for Pact)

Overview

- 1.1 Pact welcomes the opportunity to comment on this thematic review of representation and portrayal on the BBC.
- 1.2 Our comments are from an independent production point of view rather than audience stand point. We recognize that Ofcom already has a wealth of information from the PSB compliance reports about how audiences in the nations and English regions feel about how their communities are represented on screen both to a local audience and to the rest of the UK.
- 1.3 Pact has been a long term advocate of the need for building sustainable production companies in the UK's nations and regions. This objective can contribute to a competitive and diverse marketplace of production companies that are in a position to supply content that authentically reflects the lives and experiences of the full diversity of communities across the UK.

Public Purpose 4: Reflecting, representing and serving the diverse communities of all of the UK's nations and regions

Representing the nations and regions

- 2.1 Pact welcomes the recent injection of additional funding to the BBC in the nations and the new channel for BBC Scotland scheduled to launch in autumn 2018. This, along with the quotas for the individual nations and regions in the BBC Operating Licence, should help support investment in the nations and regions encouraging increased representation and portrayal.
- 2.2 It is important that local BBC commissioning opportunities in the nations open out to the market, in a similar way to BBC network commissioning. Full contestability in the nations and regions is important. We have had a constructive dialogue with the BBC in the nations about contestability and acknowledge that titles such as *River City* and *Pobol Y Cwm* (as referred to in the BBC creative plan for 2017/18) are valuable returning strands that should be open to competition supporting investment in the nations and regions.
- 2.3 Pact has also called for the BBC to introduce a more detailed reporting structure in the BBC Annual Report to help it comply with the Ofcom quotas. For the BBC to meet these obligations it needs to be able to assess the long-term value of the BBC's investments outside of London. We would welcome more detailed reporting by the BBC in terms of its Out of London commissioning obligations linked to hours and content spend broken down by nation and region with detail for the English regions included alongside the nations.
- 2.4 One issue that Pact has consistently highlighted is the importance for independent production companies based in the nations and regions to secure returning series. This will support them in building sustainable businesses in the UK nations and regions. This allows them to both reflect and tell the stories of their local communities authentically whilst also providing both professional and commercial development for teams and companies.
- 2.5 As we set out in our *A new model: Building a sustainable independent production sector in Scotland* report in 2015, the following recommendations, we proposed, would help drive scale for companies out of London across the UK. The report was based on interviews with companies both based in Scotland and across the nations and regions.

Pact recommendations

Broadcasters and commissioners:

- More targeted local commissioning: greater support from local commissioners with commissions that drive scale, volume and secondary revenues; more active support of co-commissioning and the championing of local producers. This will help companies build their business to develop capacity for network production too.
- More strategic and commercial network commissioning: focused commissioning of smaller local producers in key genres that deliver volume, continuity for business planning and support the development of centres of excellence.
- Greater embedding of UK commissioners: more visibility and presence of UK commissioners in the nations. Commissioners should be open to developing both new and existing relationships with Indies.
- Investing in talent: develop existing programmes to support both the next generation leaders and new talent through setting up shadowing schemes for key executives, mentoring and training.

2.6 BBC and other broadcasters in the nations should be encouraged to commission in a way locally that helps companies drive scale and capacity from within the nations and regions of the UK. Network commissioners should also commission in a way that both reflects local audiences but tells a story of interest to a UK audience. This will help build sustainable businesses in the UK's nations and regions and maintain a diverse supply of content reflecting the full diversity of communities across the UK.

2.7 We note the reference and importance of accurate and authentic portrayal in meeting this public purpose. One way for the BBC to authentically reflect life in local communities is to include the use of local writers and producers which can help support the development and production of content that genuinely reflects communities out of London in a way that feels authentic to those communities.

2.8 There is also a sense amongst some producers based out of London that content sometimes has a London focused perspective e.g. The Met: Policing London or The Hospital. Arguably, in these and similar cases, the programme could have been made or filmed in multiple other locations across the UK.

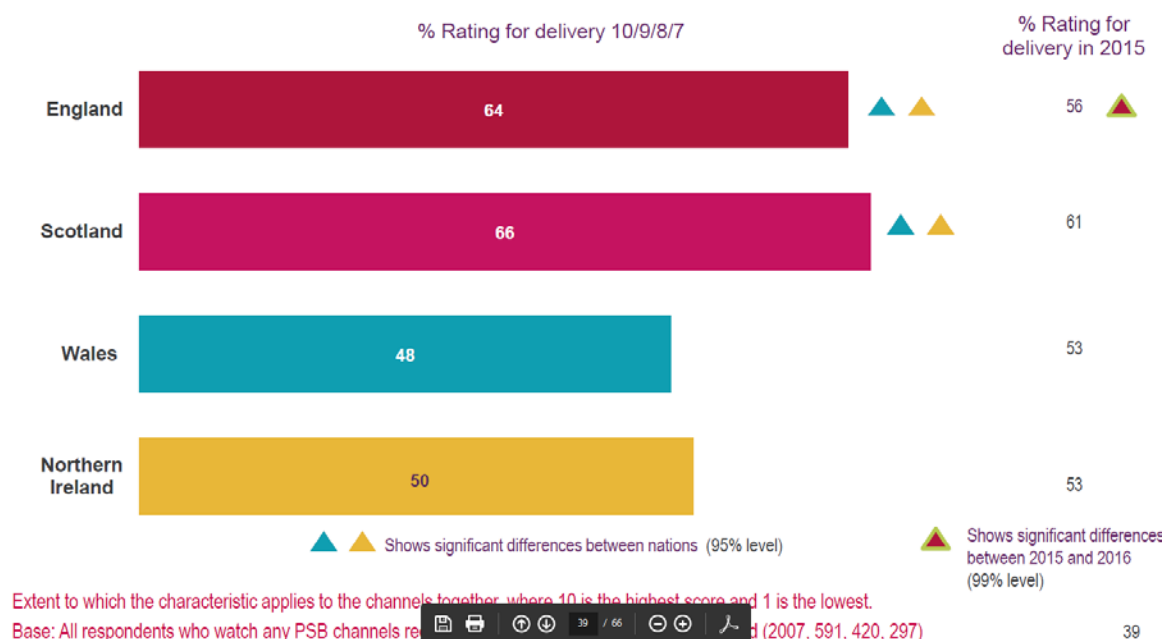
2.9 Pact is particularly interested in further detail as to how the BBC will diversify spend across the English regions beyond the existing production bases of Salford/ Manchester, Bristol and Birmingham. We welcome further information about how the BBC will engage with new and existing Indies in centres such as the North East, Leeds and Sheffield too in order to reflect the full diversity of communities across the UK on screen.

Audience view

Ofcom PSB Annual Research report 2017

Pact recognises that from an audience perspective there is still work to do in ensuring that a greater proportion of the audience in the nations and regions (and particularly Wales and Northern Ireland) feel as though their nation/region is reflected fairly to the rest of the UK.

Fig 24 'It portrays my region/ Scotland/ Northern Ireland/ Wales fairly to the rest of the UK



Portrayal of younger audiences

- 3.1 In terms of the portrayal of younger audiences, the BBC obviously plays an important role in the children’s space as virtually last remaining buyer of UK children’s content. Pact’s response to Ofcom’s Review of Children’s Content underlines the importance of delivering on the criteria for commercial PSBs in order to ensure a sustainable UK children’s production sector in the future.
- 3.2 The switch of BBC Children’s to a fewer, bigger brands strategy will be an important opportunity for some companies but also reduces the number of opportunities available to the market. It is even more important that strands such as Blue Peter at BBC Children’s in Salford/BBC North becomes open to market competition. We also recognise the BBC intention to commission content that caters to older children, arguably because the commercial PSBs are not fully meeting their obligations in this space.
- 3.3 In terms of content for older children and young adults this is supplied in part through commissioning by BBC Learning, BBC Bitesize and BBC3 which appeals to the 16-34 age group. The unifying theme of this type of content in the online space is the gap in the protection of intellectual property rights for producers. The Terms of Trade framework which has developed a successful independent production sector from a small cottage industry to a global industry in the space of ten years, does not apply to content commissioned for online viewing.
- 3.4 Pact is calling for a fairer deal for online/digital producers and to ensure that new entrants to the market making online content for BBC3, BBC Learning or BBC Children’s have more control over their own IP in order to exploit this both in the UK and internationally. This will become particularly important as the value in short form content grows as it becomes increasingly commissioned by the broadcasters and platforms.
- 3.5 Without an ability to secure more diverse revenues then this next generation of production companies struggle to build sustainable production centres out of London in

the future. Producer control over their IP and the subsequent secondary revenues will drive further research, development and innovation into quality content.

Ethnic diversity and portrayal

- 4.1 We welcome Ofcom steps towards building more comprehensive tracking data about BBC representation and portrayal.
- 4.2 From a diversity point of view out of London, Pact supports the BBC's current approach for suppliers which takes into consideration the gaps and barriers for separate genres and types of programming.
- 4.3 Pact believes that the BBC needs adequate resources in place to help suppliers across the UK. A dialogue throughout the production process is vital particularly for smaller companies with limited resources and those who are making content from outside of London. Since the BBC's diversity strategy has been in place many producers have expressed frustration at the lack of support or resources available to them for their specific production.
- 4.4 We would like to see greater transparency on how the BBC's Diversity development and portrayal funds can be accessed. It is felt that only those who understand internal process at the BBC are successfully accessing the fund at the moment. We would welcome further information from the BBC as to the projects that have benefitted from portrayal funding so far.
- 4.5 Pact continues to work alongside the BBC and others in the industry to promote and support greater diversity on and off screen. We are involved in the pan-industry monitoring system Diamond, we run our own entry level industry schemes and we also work closely with other bodies such as Directors UK, Creative Skillset, BFI, Equity and the Cultural Diversity Network (CDN), of which Pact CEO John McVay is the current Chair, to promote diversity.