

I would like to make the following observation about BBC Sounds.

It is absolutely appropriate for the BBC to ensure that its publicly funded programmes are available for as many people to hear as possible.

Assuming that they have contributed to their funding, that is they can only be heard by those who pay their licence fee.

Is it appropriate that the range of subjects and the aesthetic of many of the podcasts on Sounds are merely imitating what is already available in the market place? I don't think it is. Endless celebrities interviewing other celebrities. A comedian sitting alongside an expert because otherwise there is a chance the listener won't be able to understand what they are being told. True Crime. Sci-fi and fantasy. Producer as presenter. The BBC is no longer leading or creating a new aural aesthetic. It is just copying others. But my final point is my main one. To pay for this proliferation of programmes the BBC is cutting back on the very programmes that were pure public service and that the market was not providing and still isn't.

Please consider these figures for Drama on Radio 4 across three financial years:

16-17: 413.25 hours
19-20: 239.75 hours
21-22: 160.25 hours

These figures do not include the long running series Home Front or The Archers.

20-21 will be almost impossible to calculate because of the impact of Covid-19 on production and therefore delivery and transmission.

21-22 figures are based on what was listed for commission in the early Spring of 2020.

16-17 was based on a thorough interrogation of BBC Radio 4 online schedules.

Although these figures are an estimate the direction of travel is obvious. Of course, not all the cuts are because of the need to fund BBC Sounds and it's increasingly large team of commissioners, assistants etc etc (more I warrant than actually commission the whole of the individual networks). But a lot can be explained by having to fund BBC Sounds. And that is the

explanation given to programme makers by the commissioning editors for the reduction in commissions.

For the listeners this will mean an increased number of repeats.

If BBC Sounds was using network drama money to make drama for BBC Sounds then perhaps this would not be an issue. But it is not.

And for its very few drama commissions it is asking producers to deliver network standard work on smaller budgets, expecting actors and writers to work for less and assign more rights.

This reduction is a huge dereliction of the BBC's public service responsibilities to the cultural industry of this country as a nurturer of new writing, new writers and performers.