

7 Publicly-funded services and functions

“What do you think of the television, radio and online services the BBC provides?”

Key findings

- 75% of those surveyed said they were generally satisfied with the BBC’s services – but the public holds a wide range of criticisms
- BBC 1 and BBC 2 are the two services that most people think of first when they think of the BBC
- There is very low public awareness of some licence-fee funded services, particularly the BBC’s newer services

Overall, people appear to be satisfied with the BBC’s services...

- 7.1 When they think about the services and functions provided by the BBC, all our research and consultation shows that most people are satisfied: 75% of those surveyed expressed overall satisfaction. This figure was higher, at 84%, amongst consultation respondents, although the consultation is not statistically representative. 20% of those surveyed quantitatively were extremely satisfied, and over one thousand respondents were enthusiastic about BBC programmes.

“u dare take off the cbbc channel an i will hunt u down and kill u. ok dont u dare.”

Consultation respondent, name supplied

- 7.2 It is worth noting that our research shows that typical BBC viewers and listeners are in the mid-range socio-economic groups, older age groups and are lighter television viewers.

...and tend to feel that that the BBC provides ‘something for everyone’.

- 7.3 The majority of people (76% in our quantitative survey) thought that the BBC had something to offer them, and the view from consultation and research was that the BBC’s rightly tried to provide something for everyone was valuable. People typically think that the BBC’s output is very broad, and that this makes the licence fee better value for money. Quantitative research shows that 58% of people feel that the BBC does currently provide ‘something for everyone’. However, providing ‘something for everyone’ is not a quality unique to the BBC – ITV performed just as well in our quantitative survey.

Auntie becomes uncle

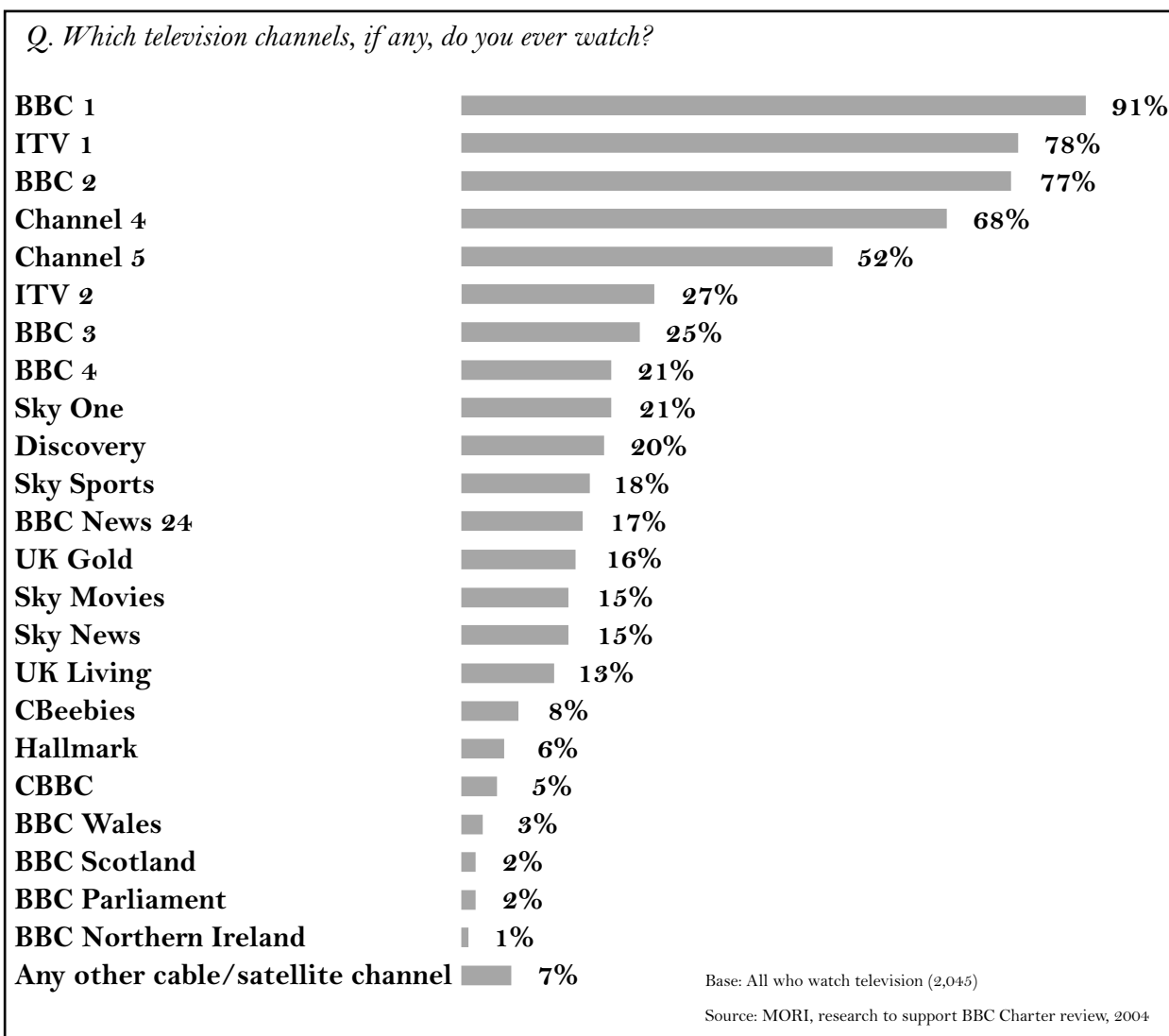
Our qualitative research found that, irrespective of attitudes towards the BBC, the public had a similar perception of its identity and values. According to the research, the BBC was personified as ‘a man in his 50s, suited, comfortably off, conventional, conservative and reserved, who appeared friendly but was powerful and sometimes domineering’. These characteristics made the BBC seem like ‘one of us’ to some of its keenest followers, but for others meant it was remote and out of touch.

7.4 There is a significant minority who find very little about the BBC that appeals to them. 15% of participants in our quantitative survey either tended to or strongly agreed with the statement ‘the BBC does not offer anything for me’. And both our qualitative and quantitative research found that some groups, particularly lower-range socio-economic groupings and people in Scotland, were less likely to think that the BBC catered for people like them, with one third of participants in quantitative research agreeing that the BBC is ‘elitist’ in its attitude.

TV tends to be uppermost in most people’s minds...

7.5 Quantitative and qualitative research shows that when most people think of broadcasting they tend to think first of all about television. BBC1 and BBC2 remain the ‘flagship’ channels, and they are also the two channels that most people think of when they think of TV, with nine out of ten people watching BBC1. Of the digital channels, BBC3 and BBC4 are reasonably well known, with around a quarter of those surveyed saying that they watch these channels.

7.6 Deliberative and qualitative research showed in particular that people have a tendency to focus their views on BBC1 when talking about the Corporation. It is used as an example by people wanting to praise the BBC for a long list of perceived virtues, such as quality, professionalism, trustworthiness, truth and intelligence. On the other hand, it is also cited as an example of perceived ‘dumbing down’, and of stagnation.



...although people have plenty to say about radio...

- 7.7 Our qualitative and deliberative research shows that people have a different kind of relationship with radio than they do with TV. Listening and viewing habits are different: people who do listen to the radio tend to listen to only a few stations, while TV viewers tend to ‘channel hop’.
- 7.8 Of the BBC’s national radio stations, BBC Radio 2 is the most popular, with 34% of those surveyed quantitatively identifying themselves as listeners. Nevertheless, more people – 40% – claim to listen to their local commercial stations. For those interviewed in Wales and who have access, 30% listen to BBC Radio Wales – the equivalent figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland are 22% and 38% respectively.
- 7.9 The issue of spectrum scarcity and how the BBC is positioned within the radio market generates pronounced criticism from some of the BBC’s major competitors, who claim that the BBC holds too large a slice of analogue spectrum.

...the digital services were mentioned by a few...

- 7.10 Although compared to BBC 1 and 2, fewer people appear to know about or watch the BBC’s digital TV channels, what people think about them is quite clear. Research and consultation both show that people who watch them tend to appreciate the increased choice, and improved sound and picture quality.

Digital television

The Government is committed to switching from analogue terrestrial transmissions to wholly digital transmissions for the benefits it brings to consumers and to the UK economy.

By going to digital, as well as all the channels you can get now, you can get:

- extra channels without paying a subscription;
- interactive services by pressing a button on your remote control; and
- other services such as programme information, which is similar to having your television magazine on screen

The Government will only switch off the analogue TV signal when we are satisfied that everyone who can receive BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4, S4C, Channel 5 and Teletext on analogue will be able to receive those services digitally and that everyone can afford to convert to digital.

At present, television channels are being broadcast on analogue and digital simultaneously which is expensive and wasteful. Digital technology is the technology of the future and the change is inevitable. We want to ensure that change is managed smoothly and effectively.

- 7.11 When it comes to digital radio, awareness is generally low. BBC Five Live Sports Extra was the most popular of these services among those surveyed quantitatively, with 5% saying that they listened to it, while most of the other BBC digital stations were listened to by around 1%.

...and BBC online is popular.

- 7.12 22% of participants in quantitative research were aware of online services. 43% of people with access to the internet have used BBC Online. Research and consultation confirmed that users of the BBC website value it highly.
- 7.13 The most frequently praised areas of online were its news service and regional information. A number of organisations, such as Community Service Volunteers, would like to see the potential of this medium as a vehicle for drawing in audiences from the widest possible backgrounds maximised. There was also repeated and vigorous praise from consultation respondents – children and adults alike – for its educational content, for example the *Bite Size* exam revision materials.
- 7.14 There are criticisms from competitors too, who tended to put forward the argument that BBC Online’s product – which they agree is of high quality – has, nevertheless, been produced at the expense of potential commercial competitors. There are also calls from a number of organisations for BBC Online’s remit to be clarified and for it to ensure that it serves the broadest possible audience. This issue is covered in more detail in the independent review of BBC Online conducted by Philip Graf, and which will form an important piece of evidence for Charter Review.

How the BBC engages with its remit also attracted comment

- 7.15 A recurrent concern expressed, particularly by other television and radio broadcasters in consultation, focused on the BBC’s remit – what it does and what it’s for. They call for the BBC’s remit – both for the organisation as a whole and for the individual services – to be spelt out more clearly. They say this will give them more certainty about what the BBC is supposed to do, which would make things fairer for them. This is explored further in Section 11. One major broadcaster argued that the BBC’s publicly-funded activity should be related more closely to its core purposes as a broadcaster.