

RESPONSE BY THE INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING TRUST (IBT)

TO THE BBC CONSULTATION

A NEW BBC THREE CHANNEL:

PUBLIC INTEREST TEST CONSULTATION

Executive Summary

IBT welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on the return of BBC Three as a broadcast channel.

IBT broadly welcomes the proposals set out in the consultation document. However, we are disappointed that there is no mention in the document of the important role that international current affairs plays in the channel's output. We strongly recommend that the BBC revises its plans for the channel to make clear its commitment to placing international current affairs at the heart of the schedule.

International current affairs is a highly valued aspect of BBC Three's programming, particularly for young audiences, and it also enables BBC Three to fulfil Purpose 1 of the Charter.

BBC Three has a track record of innovation in international current affairs and of using new formats to find ways of connecting to young audiences. This began with the Blood, Sweat and T-Shirts strand and more recently has included programmes presented by Stacey Dooley and Reggie Yates. BBC Three has also excelled in engaging young audiences with international content presented by young people, often describing their own experiences of returning to their country of origin, such as Women, Weddings, War and Me.

As the BBC strives to be distinctive from its competitors, it is striking that BBC Three's international current affairs content has always been distinctive from that of other broadcasters and therefore it makes an important contribution in helping to fulfil the BBC's broader remit to be distinctive.

We consider that all the public service broadcasters (PSBs), including BBC Three, play an important role in engaging a range of audiences with international content.

Now that the UK has left the European Union, there is a real danger that we will become more inward looking as a nation. Many of the challenges that we face such as Covid and climate change are global in their nature. International current affairs therefore has a more important role than ever in engaging the UK public with the wider world.

In 2015, IBT opposed the BBC's proposal to close BBC Three as a broadcast channel as we felt at the time that maintaining the broadcast channel would help to maximise its impact and reach. We therefore welcome the reversal of this decision.

We also welcome the proposal to continue providing content on the iPlayer. We believe that this twin track strategy is the most effective way to maximise audiences.

There is a real danger that the BBC will under serve young audiences therefore special efforts need to be made to provide content that engages these audiences.

From its earliest days, BBC Three has successfully engaged young audiences with its international content. We are keen to see this continue to play a central role in the new BBC Three and would encourage the BBC to amend the proposed remit for the new channel accordingly. We refer specifically to international current affairs. We are not advocating the return of news bulletins to BBC Three.

Who we are

IBT (International Broadcasting Trust) is a charity that works with the media to ensure that audiences continue to be engaged with global issues.

We are making this submission on behalf of our membership, which comprises more than forty organisations working in international development and on environmental issues. These include Oxfam, ActionAid, Plan International, WWF, British Red Cross, MSF, WaterAid, Practical Action, Islamic Relief, CAFOD, Christian Aid and Tearfund.

IBT has a longstanding interest in the role of the public service broadcasters and we have been involved in a range of consultations including those regarding the Communications Act (2003), the Digital Economy Act (2010) and the BBC Charter (2017).

We believe that all the PSBs play an important role in engaging a wide range of audiences with international content. They have the unique ability to reach mainstream audiences and are a key source of information for all audiences about global events.

Question 1: What do you think about the potential public value of our proposals for a BBC Three broadcast TV channel, including the extent to which our proposals contribute to the BBC's mission to serve all audiences through the provision of high quality and distinctive output and services which informs, educates and entertains?

We believe that the proposal to bring BBC Three back as a TV channel will enhance the public value of its output by making it more readily available to a wide range of audiences. Not everyone has internet access or chooses to access TV content via VOD.

We also believe that its presence as a TV channel and recognised brand will drive audiences to watch more of its content online.

We would also like to see BBC Three given prominence on the EPG.

Whilst we believe that the return of BBC Three as a broadcast channel will bring significant public value, we are concerned that a key aspect of its output – international current affairs – receives no mention in the consultation document.

The absence of this aspect of BBC Three's output reduces the public value of the proposal. We believe that BBC Three should contribute to Purpose 1. Sometimes it is assumed that Purpose 1 refers only to news but this is not the case. It clearly refers to 'current affairs and factual programming' which helps 'people understand and engage with the world around them'. This purpose is relevant to all audiences and therefore this aspect of BBC Three's output should be included in any future proposal.

We ask that the BBC reconsiders its proposal for the remit of BBC Three, and includes international current affairs.

We support the BBC in its decision to make young people the target audience of BBC Three. We would like to see greater innovation by the BBC in its coverage of global issues to appeal to this audience. BBC Three has a strong track record of doing so and therefore we would encourage the channel build on what it has achieved in the past.

BBC Three has a track record of innovation in international current affairs and of using new formats to find ways of connecting to young audiences. This began with the Blood, Sweat and T-Shirts strand and more recently has included programmes presented by Stacey Dooley and Reggie Yates. BBC Three has also excelled in engaging young audiences with international content presented by young people, often describing their own experiences of returning to their country of origin, such as Women, Weddings, War and Me.

At the heart of BBC Three's approach to international current affairs has been the use of young presenters. Young audiences identify with these presenters and engage with their stories. We would like to see the channel continue with this and bring on the next generation of young presenters. These BBC Three presenters have a very personal way of telling stories that draws on their own experience and makes the channel's brand of current affairs very different from what is available elsewhere.

Since it is the BBC's goal to be distinctive, it is noteworthy that this brand of current affairs is genuinely distinctive and therefore should be built on in the future.

Just to be clear, the focus of our concern is international current affairs not news. We are not proposing that BBC Three reinstates its news bulletins.

There is extensive research to show that young people are interested in global issues and are more connected with the wider world than any previous generation. In an increasingly globalised world, a greater awareness of what is happening in other countries is a crucial asset for young people. It also helps to foster cohesion in society

and a greater understanding of people who live in the UK with connections to other parts of the world.

Question 2: What do you think about the benefit to audiences who will watch the channel, as well as wider potential social and cultural impacts?

There is a significant benefit for audiences in having access to BBC Three both online and as a TV channel. We believe that it is important that all BBC services are as widely available as possible. Some audiences prefer to watch live television; others prefer VOD. This move caters for both audiences. We also believe that the presence of a TV channel will drive new audiences to BBC VOD content as it will increase recognition of the BBC Three brand.

We welcome the ambition articulated in the consultation, to broaden the reach of BBC Three. We believe that the channel has shown that it makes an important contribution to achieving the BBC purposes and that it should be given every opportunity to maximise its audience reach.

We support the ambition of the proposal to provide distinctive content and believe that this is especially applicable to international current affairs, a genre in which BBC Three has excelled over many years.

Question 3: What impact (positive or negative) do you think our proposals for a BBC Three broadcast TV channel might have on fair and effective competition?

IBT does not believe that there will be any negative market impact as a result of implementing these proposals.

We do not believe that the return of BBC Three as a TV channel will have an adverse impact on fair and effective competition.

Question 4: Are there any steps you think we could take to minimise any potential negative effects on fair and effective competition or to promote potential positive impacts?

We do not have any suggestions to make on this point.