

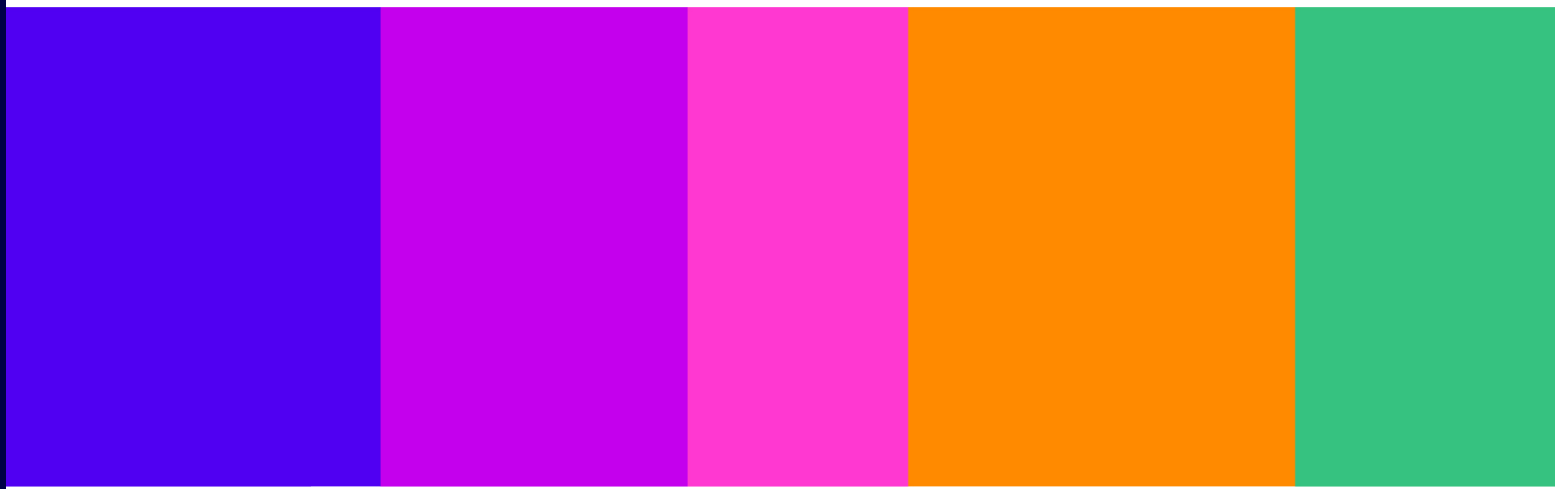
Changes to BBC Radio Foyle and BBC Asian Network

Statement on BBC's request to change its Operating Licence

Statement

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1. Overview

- 1.1 This statement sets out Ofcom’s decision on the BBC’s request to change the news and current affairs quota in its Operating Licence for BBC Radio Foyle and BBC Asian Network.
- 1.2 In April 2025, the BBC submitted a request to change its news and current affairs quota for BBC Radio Foyle from 1,043 hours to 710 hours for each financial year. It also requested a reduction in the news and current affairs quota for BBC Asian Network from 1,224 hours to 675 hours per year. In both cases, the BBC has explained the changes are driven by it seeking to better serve audience needs and a need to invest more in online and digital services at a time of significant financial constraints.
- 1.3 In November 2022, the BBC announced changes to BBC Radio Foyle, including replacing its two-hour breakfast programme with a 30-minute version. We reviewed these changes in early 2023 as part of our Operating Licence review, noting that the programme was subsequently extended to one hour in January 2024. The BBC told us that it initially considered that no licence amendment was required, but in June 2024 it confirmed this was incorrect. As a result, the BBC breached its Operating Licence condition for news and current affairs on BBC Radio Foyle. It noted in its Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24 that it would be requesting an amendment to change the condition which it did in April 2025.
- 1.4 In respect of BBC Asian Network, the BBC announced in 2024 a number of proposed changes to its schedule aimed at refocusing the station to better serve younger audiences, particularly those aged 25-34. If implemented, the BBC said the changes would mean it would be unable to meet its news and current affairs quota and it therefore requested a change to the Operating Licence.
- 1.5 Between 29 May and 26 June 2025, we consulted on our provisional view, that we were minded to approve both requests, subject to consultation. In total, we received four responses to our consultation.¹ Having carefully considered these responses we have decided to approve the BBC’s requests.

What we have decided – in brief

We have decided to approve the BBC’s request to reduce the hours of news and current affairs provision required by the Operating Licence on BBC Radio Foyle from 1,043 to 710 per financial year and on BBC Asian Network from 1,224 to 675 per financial year.

We consider that the revised news and current affairs quotas for BBC Radio Foyle and BBC Asian Network are appropriate for requiring the BBC to fulfil its Mission and promote its Public Purposes and that both proposals have the potential to meet audience needs given changing media habits.

In making these changes, we expect the BBC to be transparent about how it is delivering for audiences, and we will continue to hold it to account. We expect the BBC to monitor the impact of the changes made to BBC Radio Foyle and BBC Asian Network on audience engagement, to ensure that where necessary it continues to adapt to better serve audiences. To hold the BBC to account, as well as ensuring compliance with its quotas, we

¹ The responses we received to our consultation have been published [here](#).

will continue to assess performance. This will include how the BBC delivers news and current affairs to audiences across all of its services, including monitoring audience satisfaction, and reporting on this as part of our Annual Reports on the BBC. If we have concerns about the BBC's performance we will intervene.

We are disappointed the BBC breached its BBC Radio Foyle licence conditions. Going forward, when planning changes which may impact its compliance with the Operating Licence, the BBC must follow the correct procedures, by submitting a request to amend the Operating Licence prior to implementing the changes. Following the conclusion of the consultation process, we will now consider the breach in the context of compliance in our Annual Report on the BBC later this year.

The overview section in this document is a simplified high-level summary only. The decisions we have taken and our reasoning are set out in the full document.

2. Background

- 2.1 We are required under the BBC Charter and Agreement to set an Operating Licence for the BBC, including regulatory conditions which we consider appropriate to ensure that the BBC fulfils its Mission² and promotes its Public Purposes.³ We have the power to amend the Operating Licence following consultation with the BBC and any person we consider appropriate. Between 29 May and 26 June 2025, we consulted on the BBC's request to reduce the news and current affairs quotas on:
- a) BBC Radio Foyle from 1,043 hours to 710 hours in each financial year; and
 - b) BBC Asian Network from 1,224 hours to 675 hours in each financial year.
- 2.2 **BBC Radio Foyle:** In November 2022, the BBC announced savings and reinvestment plans for its Northern Ireland services, which included replacing BBC Radio Foyle's two-hour breakfast programme with a new 30-minute format. These and other local radio changes were reviewed in early 2023 alongside the Operating Licence, in recognition of shifting audience behaviour and the BBC's intention to strengthen its online offering. The revised breakfast show was introduced in May 2023 and later extended to one hour in January 2024. At the time, the BBC told us these plans would not require a change to its Operating Licence. However, the BBC informed us in June 2024 that it had made an error in not requesting a change and, as a result, had breached its news and current affairs condition 4.66.2 for 2023/24. It noted in its Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24 that it would be requesting an amendment to change the condition, which it did in April 2025.
- 2.3 **BBC Asian Network:** In October 2024 the BBC announced changes to its BBC Asian Network news team. It subsequently submitted a request to change its news and current affairs quota on BBC Asian Network in April 2025. In the BBC's submission, it said that in order to refocus the station to better serve younger audiences, it proposed adjustments to its news and current affairs output. It noted that these changes would affect its capacity to meet the existing quota and has consequently submitted a request to reduce that requirement. The proposed changes are to:
- a) Decommission the Ankur Desai show (currently broadcast Monday to Thursday from 3-6pm) and its associated titles, 60 Minutes and Asian Network News Presents.
 - b) In its place, commission a new, two-hour news and current affairs programme on Monday evenings and broadcast additional simulcast (with BBC Radio 1 and BBC Radio 1Xtra) drivetime 15-minute *Newsbeat* bulletins Monday to Thursday (currently the extended drivetime *Newsbeat* is only broadcast on BBC Asian Network on a Friday).
 - c) Deliver an additional 10-20 hours of standalone current affairs programming annually.
- 2.4 As well as requesting a reduction to the news and current affairs quota, the BBC's submission also set out proposals for scheduling and editorial changes to its news and

² The BBC's Mission is to act in the public interest, serving all audiences through the provision of impartial, high-quality and distinctive output and services which inform, educate and entertain (article 5 of the Charter).

³ The Public Purposes of the BBC are 1) to provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them; 2) to support learning for people of all ages; 3) to show the most creative, highest quality and distinctive output and services; 4) to reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all of the UK's nations and regions and, in doing so, support the creative economy across the UK; and 5) to reflect the UK, its culture and values to the world (article 6 of the Charter).

current affairs output on BBC Asian Network. This includes commissioning a new music-focused programme to support new British Asian artists broadcast on weekday afternoons to replace the *Ankur Desai show*, and plans to retain its business programme, *The Everyday Hustle*. We noted that these were relevant to our consideration of the BBC's request, but do not require any variation to the Operating Licence.⁴

- 2.5 We consider variations to the Operating Licence within the framework of the relevant legal and regulatory requirements, which are set out in Annex 2.
- 2.6 Our assessment of whether to vary the Operating Licence therefore considered, among other things, the potential impact of the changes on the BBC's delivery of its Mission and promotion of the Public Purposes, including ensuring that audiences in Northern Ireland and British Asian audiences are well-served with news and current affairs output.
- 2.7 We also carried out an equality impact assessment of the proposed variations, which we set out in the consultation document and considered the potential impact of the BBC's changes on fair and effective competition.⁵

⁴ Ofcom, [Consultation on BBC's request to change its Operating Licence](#), p.4.

⁵ Ofcom, [Consultation on BBC's request to change its Operating Licence](#).

3. BBC Radio Foyle – stakeholder comments and our responses

- 3.1 Out of the four responses we received to our [consultation](#), three responses related to BBC Radio Foyle.⁶ In this section we discuss stakeholder views on our provisional conclusions and then set out our response. We consider comments received about the impact on audiences, the potential impacts of the changes on the BBC’s delivery of its Mission and promotion of the Public Purposes, followed by comments on the potential impact on competition. We also discuss other comments raised about holding the BBC to account for breaching its Operating Licence condition and the timeline between the changes being made and our consultation in May this year.

Impact on audiences

What we said

- 3.2 As set out in Section 2 of this statement, our consultation proposed approving the BBC’s request to reduce its Operating Licence quota for news and currents affairs on BBC Radio Foyle from 1,043 hours to 710 hours in each financial year. The consultation set out our provisional view that the revised news and current affairs quota would be appropriate for requiring the BBC to fulfil its Mission and promote its Public Purposes. We said that the BBC’s changes had the potential to meet audience needs in the Foyle region given, in particular, that audiences increasingly get their news and current affairs content online.⁷ We also noted that Radio Foyle serves an adult population of 136,000 and so any impacts were likely to be very limited.⁸
- 3.3 Our consultation explained that the BBC told us that following the changes, more local stories have been broadcast per hour on BBC Radio Foyle. It said that the average Foyle online weekly traffic as a proportion of all Northern Ireland average weekly traffic has also increased. We therefore considered that the overall changes have the potential to better meet audience needs.⁹

Summary of stakeholder views

- 3.4 The BBC agreed with our provisional view to reduce the news and current affairs quota for BBC Radio Foyle, stating that the changes were made to focus its spending on digital and online services and deliver a more locally focused news and current affairs offer across all platforms. Ofcom’s Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland (ACNI) agreed partially with the proposal, noting that while it does not believe the case for the change was made clearly at the time, the disruption to services by reversing the decision is too great. Radiocentre stated it has concerns with the proposed change based on what it considered to be the

⁶ [Advisory Committee for Northern Ireland](#), [BBC](#), and [Radiocentre](#).

⁷ Ofcom, [Consultation on BBC’s request to change its Operating Licence](#), p.12.

⁸ Ofcom, [Consultation on BBC’s request to change its Operating Licence](#), p.9-10.

⁹ Ofcom, [Consultation on BBC’s request to change its Operating Licence](#), p.10-12.

fundamental principle that the BBC should not be retreating from local news provision.¹⁰ We consider stakeholder points raised by theme below.

Local news and currents affairs content

Stakeholder views

- 3.5 ACNI stated that “all media in Northern Ireland are accused of being Belfast-centric”, noting that BBC Radio Foyle was perhaps a “singular example of broadcast news coverage specifically for that area”. It highlighted that although the audience was small, the impact in the service area and the representation it gave had been hugely valued by that community. As such, ACNI suggested that any reduction was a “significant net reduction” in coverage of the Foyle area.¹¹
- 3.6 Radiocentre stated that the reduction in the quota represented “another step back” in the BBC’s commitment to local programming, following the changes to BBC Local Radio in England in 2023.¹²
- 3.7 The BBC stated that the changes made to BBC Radio Foyle had benefited audiences in the Foyle area. It said that by amalgamating news journalists under one North West Bureau, it had published more stories from BBC Radio Foyle online, which had increased the average Foyle weekly traffic, and an increased number of stories included in the services’ breakfast programming.¹³

Our response

- 3.8 The BBC is required by the Operating Licence to ensure that it provides content of interest and relevance to all audiences in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, the transparency requirements in the Operating Licence require the BBC to publish plans for how it proposes to deliver to these audiences including across its online service. The BBC must be mindful of this as it develops its services.
- 3.9 We noted in our consultation that the BBC said that prior to the change, approximately 2-15% of the stories on the Foyle breakfast show were specific to the local area.¹⁴ Since the change, it said that on average, it broadcast 1.1 more local stories per hour and more stories overall per hour on *North West Today* than it did on *Breakfast on Foyle*. While the increases are relatively modest, they remain notable in a climate of shrinking budgets. We consider this as evidence that this change has the potential to benefit audiences and contribute to the promotion of Public Purpose 1.
- 3.10 We disagree with stakeholders that reinvestment into digital services may reduce the public value generated by BBC Radio Foyle’s news and current affairs content. As we noted in our consultation, due to financial constraints, the BBC needs to work with less budget while continuing to fulfil its obligations to serve all audiences. We recognise that following the changes in Northern Ireland, such as the merging of journalistic hubs, there has been an increase in the news and current affairs outputs delivered to audiences in the Foyle region.

¹⁰ [BBC response](#), p.1-2; [ACNI response](#), p.4; Radiocentre response, p.3.

¹¹ [ACNI response](#), p.3.

¹² [Radiocentre response](#), p.3.

¹³ [BBC response](#), p.1.

¹⁴ Ofcom, [Consultation on BBC’s request to change its Operating Licence](#), p.10.

Reaching underserved audiences

Stakeholder views

- 3.11 ACNI stated that the Foyle region was “one of the most economically deprived in Northern Ireland”, and that “reducing services in this area does not help the BBC’s issue with attracting audiences from C2DE demographics to its services”.¹⁵
- 3.12 Radiocentre stated that older audiences tended to rely more on linear broadcast services than younger audiences. It noted that in our consultation we highlighted the BBC’s increased investment in digital local news for Northern Ireland, but said it was not clear that these formats could or should be substituted on a like-for-like basis. It stated that broadcast radio news was highly trusted, particularly effective at reaching audiences passively, and especially valued by audiences who may not actively seek out news elsewhere.¹⁶

Our response

- 3.13 Our data suggests that while listening to news on broadcast services remains popular, listening to online services is increasing year-on-year. Our latest data shows that similar proportions of people now get their news from online sources (65%) as broadcast TV (64%), followed by radio and social media (both 46%). Among those aged 55+ (one of the largest listener age groups to BBC Radio Ulster/Foyle) broadcast TV remains the most mentioned platform for news (91%) followed by radio and online (both 52%).¹⁷ As we noted in our consultation, the BBC is required to serve all audiences, including younger audiences that increasingly rely on output delivered online. These audiences are also interested in local news, with 40% of 15-24 listeners saying they listen to local news on the radio.¹⁸
- 3.14 We note the point raised by ACNI around the BBC reaching audiences from lower socio-economic backgrounds. While [data from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#) suggests that the Derry area includes some of the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland, there is very little evidence to indicate any marked differences in terms of socio-economic groups across Northern Ireland. As set out above, given the limited data available on audience demographics in the Foyle region, we cannot assess whether listening in the Foyle area has decreased among C2DE audiences. However, as part of our annual reporting on the BBC, we continue to review the BBC’s performance in serving audiences from different demographic groups across its services.

Transparency of audience engagement and consultation

Stakeholder views

- 3.15 ACNI stated that while the changes to BBC Radio Foyle had been attributed by the BBC to making financial savings, improving services, innovating for audiences, and addressing underserved audiences, it considered that the evidence justifying the changes had not been fully transparent.¹⁹

¹⁵ [ACNI response](#), p.5.

¹⁶ [Radiocentre response](#), p.3.

¹⁷ Ofcom News Consumption Survey 2018 and 2025.

¹⁸ IPA TouchPoints 2025.

¹⁹ [ACNI response](#), p.5.

- 3.16 Radiocentre said that the proposal was supported by “limited evidence”, and referred to a passage in our consultation that explained it was not possible to determine whether the reduction in news and currents affairs output on BBC Radio Foyle had contributed to the changes in listening.²⁰

Our response

- 3.17 As we set out in the consultation, the scheduling changes implemented by the BBC were well-publicised in November 2022, with implementation beginning in May 2023.²¹ We note that the later extension of the programme and enhanced online coverage, were made in response to audience and staff feedback.²² As previously highlighted, BBC Radio Foyle serves a very small population of 136,000 adults and as a result, the BBC says monitoring the performance of BBC Radio Foyle is difficult.²³
- 3.18 As part of its submission, the BBC referenced data sources that informed the development of its proposal and shared these with us for consideration. In forming our provisional view, we also conducted an independent assessment, which included an analysis of our own audience research. Prior to this, we did not receive any feedback from stakeholders indicating a negative impact on the quality of output or service to audiences resulting from the changes to BBC Radio Foyle.
- 3.19 We are encouraged by the BBC confirming in its submission that it is monitoring the performance of the changes to news and currents affairs on BBC Radio Foyle.²⁴ We will continue to build this into our assessment of the BBC’s performance to ensure it continues to serve all audiences in Northern Ireland and will step-in if we identify any evidence of concern.

Operating Licence breach

Stakeholder views

- 3.20 ACNI noted that the extended timeline between the initial changes being proposed in 2022, implemented in 2023, revised in 2024 and now being consulted on presented real challenges and risks limiting the agility and clarity needed by the BBC and the wider industry. ACNI expressed that in the future, consulting on proposed changes needed to take place more swiftly to better reflect the urgency and pressures of the media landscape.²⁵
- 3.21 Radiocentre noted that the BBC’s proposal for BBC Radio Foyle was effectively retrospective and was only requested after it had breached its Operating Licence condition. It stated that this set a “concerning precedent” and that Ofcom was effectively “formalising a breach that has already occurred, rather than holding the BBC accountable for delivering on its existing public service obligations”.²⁶

Our response

²⁰ [Radiocentre response](#), p.3.

²¹ Ofcom, [Consultation on BBC’s request to change its Operating Licence](#), p.7.

²² BBC, [BBC Radio Foyle’s North West Today programme to be extended to one hour](#), 2023.

²³ [BBC’s request to change the Operating Licence](#), p.17.

²⁴ [BBC’s request to change the Operating Licence](#), p.19.

²⁵ [ACNI response](#), p.6.

²⁶ [Radiocentre response](#), p.3.

- 3.22 We recognise the concerns raised by both ACNI and Radiocentre over the BBC’s breach of its news and current affairs quota for BBC Radio Foyle in its Operating licence.
- 3.23 It is important the BBC can make changes to its services as audiences’ media habits continue to evolve, and given its financial constraints and requirements to serve all audiences. As set out in the consultation, we were aware of the proposed changes to Radio Foyle and acknowledged these in our [Modernising the Operating Licence](#) statement in March 2023. The BBC then made this change in May 2023, but it did not request a change to the Operating Licence.²⁷
- 3.24 As we set out in our 2023/24 Annual Report on the BBC, the BBC notified us in June 2024 that it had failed to meet the quota of 1,043 hours for news and current affairs programming on BBC Radio Foyle, delivering only 743 hours in 2023/24. The BBC told us that due to an internal miscommunication, where non-opted news content—i.e. programming from BBC Radio Ulster—was mistakenly included in the calculation, it incorrectly believed it would still be able to meet its quota for this condition.²⁸
- 3.25 The BBC told us that once the error was realised, it informed Ofcom that it should have requested a licence change when the changes were announced and that it would be submitting a change to amend the Operating Licence condition to reflect the service’s current output.²⁹ Following this, the BBC notified us that it would be submitting additional Operating Licence change requests (BBC Asian Network) at the same time to ensure efficiency.
- 3.26 We outlined in our Annual Report on the BBC, that non-compliance with these quotas is a potentially serious matter. We said it is important that the BBC takes reasonable steps to ensure it meets its quotas and monitors its output throughout the year, to ensure that any issues are identified in a timely manner. We stated that where the BBC is planning to make changes that are likely to impact its compliance with the Operating Licence, it is important it follows the correct processes and requests to amend the Operating Licence before it implements its changes.³⁰
- 3.27 We understand stakeholders’ concerns that our approval of the BBC’s request to reduce news and current affairs could set a precedent for further Operating Licence changes. However, we are clear that the BBC must ensure that the correct procedures are followed and that a request to amend the Operating Licence is submitted *prior* to implementing any changes. Only after conducting a thorough assessment of whether the requested change would be appropriate for requiring the BBC to fulfil its Mission and promote its Public Purposes and meeting audience needs, would we arrive at a provisional view and consult on that. We emphasise that we would have serious concerns if breaches of the Operating Licence of a similar manner were to occur in the future.

²⁷ Ofcom, [Consultation on BBC’s request to change its Operating Licence](#), p.7.

²⁸ Ofcom’s Annual Report on the BBC 2023/24, [Annex 1](#), p.6.

²⁹ Ofcom’s Annual Report on the BBC 2023/24, [Annex 1](#), p.6-7.

³⁰ Ofcom’s Annual Report on the BBC 2023/24, [Annex 1](#), p.7.

Impact on competition

What we said

- 3.28 We noted that the BBC stated in its request that it did not believe the changes have had any impact on competition since they were implemented. We said stakeholders hadn't raised any competition concerns and we provisionally concluded the risk to fair and effective competition as a result of the BBC's proposal was low.³¹

Summary of stakeholder views

- 3.29 Respondents to our consultation did not raise any concerns in relation to fair and effective competition. The BBC reiterated its assessment made in its original submission that it had concluded that no adverse market impacts had resulted from the changes.³²

Our response

- 3.30 Given the above, we continue to expect there would not be any effects on fair and effective competition as a result of the change to the Operating Licence. We also understand that the BBC's change to Radio Foyle has not resulted in any additional BBC Foyle programming (it has instead involved more simulcasting from BBC Radio Ulster), which further supports our assessment of a lack of impact on competition.

Our decision

- 3.31 We have decided to proceed with our proposed amendment to the Operating Licence for the reasons set out in the consultation and above in response to stakeholders' comments. **We will therefore accept the BBC's proposed reduction of its news and current affairs quota for BBC Radio Foyle from 1,043 hours to 710 hours each financial year.** We are mindful that the BBC needs to adapt to audiences' media habits and be able to deliver where audiences want to watch and listen to content. As we outlined in our BBC Operating Licence Statement in 2023, we expect the BBC to be more innovative and experiment in how it reaches and appeals to audiences.³³
- 3.32 We expect the BBC to keep track of how the changes to BBC Radio Foyle are working and to explain with its Annual Report how it is continuing to serve audiences in the Foyle area. We also expect the BBC to take reasonable steps to ensure it meets its quotas and monitors its output throughout the year so that any issues are identified in a timely manner. We will also continue to monitor BBC performance and report on both performance and compliance in our Annual Reports on the BBC. If we identify concerns, we will not hesitate to intervene.
- 3.33 We are disappointed the BBC failed to follow the correct procedures and as a result, breached its Operating Licence condition in 2023/24 and as set out in the BBC's recent Annual Report and Accounts, breached again in 2024/25.³⁴ We reiterate to the BBC the importance of ensuring that the correct procedures are followed and that where

³¹ Ofcom, [Consultation on BBC's request to change its Operating Licence](#), p.12.

³² [BBC response](#), p.1.

³³ Ofcom, [Modernising the BBC's Operating Licence](#), p.34.

³⁴ BBC, [Annual Report & Accounts 2024/25](#), p.214.

appropriate, a request to amend the Operating Licence is submitted *prior* to implementing any changes.

- 3.34 Following the conclusion of the consultation process, we will now consider the breach in the context of compliance in our Annual Report on the BBC later this year.
- 3.35 We have issued a notice of variation to the BBC Operating Licence alongside this statement in Annex A1.

4. BBC Asian Network – stakeholder comments and our responses

- 4.1 Out of the four responses we received to our [consultation](#), three responses related to BBC Asian Network.³⁵ In this section we discuss stakeholder views on our provisional conclusions and then set out our response. We consider comments received about the impact on audiences, including the potential impacts of the changes on the BBC’s delivery of its Mission and promotion of the Public Purposes, followed by comments on the potential impact on competition. We also discuss other comments raised about holding the BBC to account for delivering news and current affairs for British Asian audiences.

Impact on audiences

What we said

- 4.2 Our consultation set out our provisional view that the revised news and current affairs quota would be appropriate for requiring the BBC to fulfil its Mission and promote its Public Purposes. We said that the BBC’s proposal has the potential to meet British Asian audiences’ needs given the ongoing shift in broadcasting consumption trends towards online platforms, especially among younger audiences and those from minority ethnic groups.
- 4.3 We noted that the BBC needs to be able to adapt its services in recognition of these changing audience habits, in order to continue to deliver to audiences where they want to watch and listen.³⁶

Importance of news and current affairs content

Stakeholder views

- 4.4 Radiocentre said that the proposed changes were concerning and would negatively affect the British Asian community. It said that specialist, in-depth news and current affairs programming was precisely the kind of distinctive content that the BBC should provide to audiences. It considered that the BBC’s proposed cuts represented a clear reduction in output meeting the BBC’s Public Purposes to provide impartial information and to reflect, represent and serve diverse communities.³⁷ Panjab Radio stated that Asian audiences relied on broadcasters, including the BBC, for news and current affairs. It said that if the changes were allowed then the Asian community would be deprived of this valuable source.³⁸ The BBC meanwhile said that it considered the changes would strengthen its news and current

³⁵ [BBC](#), [Panjab Radio](#), and [Radiocentre](#).

³⁶ Ofcom, [Consultation on BBC’s request to change its Operating Licence](#), p.14.

³⁷ [Radiocentre response](#), p.2.

³⁸ [Panjab Radio response](#), p.2.

affairs offer by engaging British Asian audiences across the UK and “bringing them into the conversation”.³⁹

- 4.5 Radiocentre also stated that the reduction in linear news was not adequately compensated for by a general commitment to digital news, and that it would deprive a significant audience of vital and culturally relevant trusted speech content. It said the situation was compounded by the BBC’s decision to merge its news operations and no longer provide its South Asian audiences with a dedicated *Newsbeat* bulletin, as well as the decommissioning the Ankur Desai show.⁴⁰

Our response

- 4.6 We agree with Panjab Radio and Radiocentre that the provision of news and current affairs on BBC Asian network remains important. In this case the BBC would still be required, under a reduced quota, to provide news and current affairs content on the station as well as to provide news bulletins regularly at frequent intervals throughout the day. In addition, the BBC remains required to deliver this content to all audiences, including British Asians.
- 4.7 However, as noted in Section 3 and in our consultation, the BBC needs flexibility in how and where it delivers its news and current affairs content,⁴¹ particularly given changing audience habits away from broadcast towards online.⁴²
- 4.8 While the BBC states that its proposed changes—including the removal of mid-afternoon news bulletins—are part of a broader effort to adapt to evolving audience needs, it still plans to broadcast news specifically during the afternoon slot, with two 15-minute bulletins, at 12.45pm and during the peak ‘drivetime’ slot at 5.45pm, Monday to Friday. As we noted in our consultation, while this output would not be specifically tailored to the BBC Asian Network audience, it would still provide news focused on serving younger audiences which would contribute to the station’s delivery of Public Purpose 1.
- 4.9 The BBC also plans to commission a new weekly Asian Network current affairs talk show, featuring topical and breaking news discussions, in-depth analysis and audience participation,⁴³ as well as additional standalone current affairs programmes throughout the year. This programming should provide British Asian audiences with culturally relevant content.
- 4.10 While the BBC does provide a wide range of news content, and increasingly on its online services, Asian audiences and audiences from other minority ethnic groups are less likely to use the BBC for news.⁴⁴ Therefore, in light of these changes, we expect the BBC to closely track how well it is meeting the needs of these audiences through its broader news and current affairs coverage, and to make sure these changes do not negatively impact them.

Targeting younger audiences vs. wider audience engagement

³⁹ [BBC’s request to change the Operating Licence](#), p.8.

⁴⁰ [Radiocentre response](#), p.2.

⁴¹ Ofcom, [Consultation on BBC’s request to change its Operating Licence](#), p.19.

⁴² Ofcom, [Consultation on BBC’s request to change its Operating Licence](#), p.14.

⁴³ [BBC’s request to change the Operating Licence](#), p.5.

⁴⁴ Ofcom News Consumption Survey 2025, 56% of Asian audiences and 60% of people from minority ethnic groups consume any BBC news - significantly lower than the proportion of White adults (68%). Note, the Asian audiences figure includes Chinese and other Asian participants in addition to those identifying as South Asian.

Stakeholder views

- 4.11 Radiocentre stated that the BBC's key justification – that it needed to appeal to younger audiences who were moving online – was not compelling. It stated that it was unclear whether a marginal increase in music programming would be successful in addressing the broader drop among 15–24-year-olds. It also stated that Ofcom noted that listening among 25–34 year olds had remained 'relatively stable' while the audience aged 35+ had grown. It said that the BBC was planning to cut valued speech for an audience that was demonstrably engaged, in pursuit of a younger demographic with no guarantee that it would be successful in attracting.⁴⁵

Our response

- 4.12 The BBC set out in its submission how the decline in radio listening among younger people necessitated a change in programming to better engage these audiences online.⁴⁶ It said that reducing the amount of news and current affairs content would allow further investment in more distinctive content, including new music and high-impact speech content, to attract younger audiences. As part of its submission, the BBC shared with us various research and data sources which it had relied upon as part of developing its proposal, which we have considered.⁴⁷ In reaching our provisional view we also undertook our own assessment, including analysing our own audience research data.⁴⁸
- 4.13 With regards to assessing the impact of the reduction in the quota on specific audiences, we considered the impact on groups that may favour traditional, linear services, especially those from an older age demographic.⁴⁹
- 4.14 We noted in our consultation that given some older audiences tend to obtain their news from radio stations, they were most likely to be impacted. However, we considered this potentially negative impact was likely to be mitigated, as most older audiences consume news via TV and are increasingly migrating online. We noted this online migration was even more pronounced amongst audiences aged 25-34, reducing the impact of the changes. We therefore considered that any adverse impact on older audiences was likely to be lessened. Our view on this equality assessment remains unchanged.⁵⁰

Impact on competition

What we said

- 4.15 We noted that the BBC stated in its request that it does not consider the proposed changes to BBC Asian Network's schedule would significantly impact other radio stations, given the differences in output of BBC Asian Network compared with other providers. It further noted that it views the proposed changes to fall outside the scope of further materiality assessment.⁵¹

⁴⁵ [Radiocentre response](#), p.2.

⁴⁶ [BBC's request to change the Operating Licence](#), p.12.

⁴⁷ [BBC's request to change the Operating Licence](#), p.3-15.

⁴⁸ Ofcom, [Consultation on BBC's request to change its Operating Licence](#), p.15-16.

⁴⁹ Ofcom, [Consultation on BBC's request to change its Operating Licence](#), Annex 3, p.24. EIA.

⁵⁰ Ofcom, [Consultation on BBC's request to change its Operating Licence](#), Annex 3, p.24. EIA.

⁵¹ [BBC's request to change the Operating Licence](#), p.14-15.

- 4.16 We stated that reducing the news and current affairs quota on BBC Asian Network itself is unlikely to have an adverse effect on fair and effective competition, especially given the differences in output of the BBC Asian Network compared with other providers.⁵²

Summary of stakeholder views

- 4.17 Radiocentre said that the proposals would negatively affect the specialist commercial radio stations that served this important audience. It said that the proposal had the potential to impact fair and effective competition and that increasing music output during a daytime slot placed additional pressure on commercial operators that catered for Asian audiences and who already operated on tight margins.⁵³
- 4.18 The BBC reiterated its conclusion that the changes would not have an adverse market impact because BBC Asian Network's competitors did not offer the bespoke news and current affairs programming the BBC provided, they covered smaller geographic areas, and had older listeners on average.^{54 55}

Our response

- 4.19 While we agree with the BBC that the market impact could be more limited due to differences between Asian Network and its competitors, we note that with regard to bespoke news, some commercial stations provide news programming tailored for British-Asian audiences. In addition, [our recent consultation](#) on local news and information on analogue radio proposes new requirements for gathering news locally and sets out proposals regarding the frequency of local news broadcasts. If adopted, this means that for some stations, including those that serve Asian communities, this would include a requirement for a greater frequency of local news than is currently the case. However, there are still differences with regards to bespoke news as the BBC is subject to more regulation than commercial stations, with the BBC required to provide a specific quota of hours.
- 4.20 With regards to Radiocentre's concern, we note that it did not provide evidence to show how the BBC's proposal had the potential to impact fair and effective competition. We understand that the BBC intends to replace the freed-up broadcast time on BBC Asian Network with content that is aimed at increasing the Network's appeal to younger listeners (i.e. 25-34 year olds). We consider that this will likely have a limited impact on Lyca and Sunrise⁵⁶ as the majority of their audiences are older than the BBC's target age range of 25-34 year olds (indeed, these stations already have a slightly older listener profile than BBC Asian Network).⁵⁷
- 4.21 Given the above, we therefore consider that the risk to fair and effective competition resulting from the BBC's proposal is low.

⁵² Ofcom, [Consultation on BBC's request to change its Operating Licence](#), p.19.

⁵³ [Radiocentre response](#), p.2.

⁵⁴ [BBC response](#), p.1.

⁵⁵ [BBC's request to change the Operating Licence](#), p.14.

⁵⁶ Sunrise Radio National

⁵⁷ We note that other stations also provide Asian-focused content, some of which we are unable to analyse on RAJAR, but these operators did not raise specific competition concerns about the impact on their stations.

Our decision

- 4.22 Based on the reasons outlined in the consultation and our responses to stakeholder feedback above, we conclude that the revised news and current affairs quota would be appropriate for requiring the BBC to fulfil its Mission and promote its Public Purposes. **As a result, we are approving the BBC's proposal to reduce the required hours of news and current affairs on the BBC Asian Network from 1,224 hours to 675 hours per financial year.**
- 4.23 We recognise the importance of making sure the BBC serves the UK's diverse communities, offers distinctive content, and delivers reliable news and information. As we noted in our consultation, as audiences' news consumption habits change, the BBC should regularly assess its performance and audience engagement to ensure it serves all BBC Asian Network's audiences with news and current affairs output where they choose to consume it.
- 4.24 In terms of holding the BBC to account, we will continue to assess the BBC's overall news provision across its services, including tracking audience satisfaction and reporting on this in our Annual Report on the BBC. The BBC also noted in its response that it intends to monitor these changes.⁵⁸ If the BBC, or Ofcom in its performance monitoring, finds that these audiences become less satisfied with news and current affairs output, we expect the BBC to make plans to address this, and we retain the ability to intervene. We also expect the BBC to take reasonable steps to ensure it meets its quotas and monitors its output throughout the year so that any issues are identified in a timely manner.
- 4.25 A notice of variation to the BBC Operating Licence has been issued alongside this statement, and is included as Annex A1.

⁵⁸ [BBC response](#), p.1.

A1. Notice of Variation

NOTICE NUMBER 3 DATED 31 JULY 2025

TO THE OPERATING LICENCE FOR THE BBC'S UK PUBLIC SERVICES ISSUED ON 23 MARCH 2023

Recitals

- (A) On 15 December 2016, the Government published the Royal Charter for the continuance of the BBC ("the Charter") and the agreement between the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, and the BBC (the "Agreement") which required Ofcom to set a licence for the BBC's UK Public Services. On 13 October 2017, Ofcom issued the first licence. This first licence was amended a few times.
- (B) On 23 March 2023, Ofcom issued the second Licence for the BBC's UK Public Services (the "Licence"). The Licence has been subsequently amended.
- (C) In accordance with Clause 80 and 13(5) of the Agreement, Ofcom's "Procedures for setting and amending the operating licence" published on 13 October 2017 (the "Procedures") and its consultation principles, Ofcom considered it appropriate in the circumstances to consult publicly on the BBC's request to make two changes to the Licence to reduce the news and current affairs quotas on BBC Radio Foyle and BBC Asian Network and proposed consequential amendments to the Licence on 29 May 2025.
- (D) Ofcom has considered all the responses to the consultation.
- (E) Following consultation, on 31 July 2025 Ofcom published a statement (the "Statement") setting out our decision to approve the BBC's request to reduce the hours of news and current affairs provision required by the Licence on BBC Radio Foyle from 1,043 to 710 per financial year and on BBC Asian Network from 1,224 to 675 per financial year.
- (F) For the reasons set out in the Statement, Ofcom has decided that it is appropriate to amend the Licence.

NOW THEREFORE the Licence shall be varied in the following manner:

- 1. Amend paragraph 1.16.1 as follows:
 - a. at least 675 hours are allocated to news and current affairs programming in each Financial Year.
- 2. Amend paragraph 4.66.2. as follows:
 - a. in each Financial Year at least 710 hours are allocated to news and current affairs programmes (including repeats) on Radio Foyle.

This variation to the Licence shall come into force with immediate effect on 31 July 2025.

SIGNED FOR OFCOM ON 31 July 2025

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'XCNL NO', enclosed within a thin black rectangular border.

Cristina Nicolotti Squires
Broadcasting and Media Group Director, Of...

A2. Legal Framework

- A2.1 Ofcom's power to regulate the BBC is derived from the Communications Act 2003 (the Act),⁵⁹ which sets out that for the purposes of the carrying out of regulation of the BBC, we will have such powers and duties as may be conferred on us by or under the Royal Charter for the continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation (the Charter)⁶⁰ and the Agreement between the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, and the BBC (the Agreement).⁶¹
- A2.2 Ofcom's general duties under section 3 of the Act also apply to the exercise of our functions in relation to the BBC.⁶² These include our principal duty to further the interests of citizens in relation to communications matters, and to further the interests of consumers in relevant markets, where appropriate by promoting competition. In performing our duties, we must have regard to the principles under which regulatory principles must be proportionate, consistent and targeted only at cases in which action is needed. The Act also requires us to have regard, as appropriate, to certain other principles we consider relevant. We consider the following principles in the Act to be relevant to this statement:
- i) The desirability of promoting the fulfilment of the purposes of public service television broadcasting in the UK;
 - ii) The needs of persons with disabilities, of the elderly, and those on low incomes;
 - iii) The opinions of consumers in relevant markets and of members of the public generally; and
- A2.3 The different interests of persons in the different parts of the UK, of the different ethnic communities within the UK and of persons living in rural and urban areas.⁶³
- A2.4 Under the Charter, Ofcom is required to have regard, in carrying out its functions in relation to the BBC, to such of the following as appear to us to be relevant in the circumstances:⁶⁴
- A2.5 The object of the BBC to fulfil its Mission⁶⁵ and promote the Public Purposes;
- i) The desirability of protecting fair and effective competition in the UK; and
 - ii) The requirement for the BBC to comply with its general duties.

⁵⁹ Section 198 of [the Act](#).

⁶⁰ [The Charter](#).

⁶¹ [The Agreement](#).

⁶² Article 45(1) of the Charter.

⁶³ Section 3(4) of the Act.

⁶⁴ Article 45(2) of the Charter.

⁶⁵ The BBC's mission is to act in the public interest, serving all audiences through the provision of impartial. High-quality and distinctive output and services which inform, educate and entertain (Article 5 of the Charter).

- A2.6 Out of the five Public Purposes,⁶⁶ the following are particularly relevant to this statement.⁶⁷
- A2.7 Public Purpose 1: To provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them; and
- A2.8 Public Purpose 4: To reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all of the United Kingdom's nations and regions and, in doing so, support the creative economy across the United Kingdom.
- A2.9 We note that, by virtue of Article 20(3)(d) of the Charter, the BBC is required to set performance measures (and targets for those measures where appropriate) and to collect such information as is necessary to assess the performance of the UK Public Services⁶⁸ in fulfilling the mission and promoting the public services.⁶⁹
- A2.10 Separately, by virtue of Article 46(4) of the Charter, Ofcom may set performance measures (further to those set by the BBC), and may collect such information as is necessary, to assess the performance of the UK Public Services in fulfilling the mission and promoting the public purposes.⁷⁰ In addition, Ofcom may require the BBC to collect such information as we consider necessary for the performance measures.⁷¹
- A2.11 In addition to setting performance measures, we are required to set an Operating Licence (the Operating Licence) containing a set of regulatory conditions with which the BBC must comply.⁷² The Charter states that the Operating Licence must contain regulatory conditions Ofcom considers appropriate for requiring the BBC to:
- i) Fulfil its Mission and promote the Public Purposes;
 - ii) Secure the provision of distinctive output and services; and
- A2.12 Secure that audiences in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and England are well served.⁷³
- A2.13 Schedule 2 of the Agreement contains some further rules regarding the regulatory conditions that Ofcom must impose through the Operating Licence.
- A2.14 We may amend the Operating Licence following consultation with the BBC and any person we consider appropriate.
- A2.15 In addition to setting an Operating Licence, we are also required to publish an operating framework.⁷⁴ The operating framework is a series of documents that cover the full range of our regulatory duties in the three areas of content standards, competition, and performance. The operating framework for BBC regulation includes the 'Procedures for

⁶⁶ Article 6 of the Charter.

⁶⁷ The BBC's delivery of its fifth Public Purpose, reflecting the UK to the world, will be achieved primarily through the BBC World Service and BBC Worldwide. The second Operating Licence does not cover the BBC World Service; responsibility for setting a Licence for the BBC World Service lies with the BBC (clause 34 of the Agreement).

⁶⁸ The UK Public Services are set out in a [List of the UK Public Services](#) maintained and published by the BBC.

⁶⁹ Clause 14(1) of the Agreement.

⁷⁰ Clause 14(2) of the Agreement.

⁷¹ Clause 14(4) of the Agreement.

⁷² Under the Charter and the Agreement, Ofcom is required to set an Operating Licence for the BBC's UK Public Services.

⁷³ Article 46(3) of the Charter.

⁷⁴ Article 46(2) of the Charter and Clause 5(1) of the Agreement.

setting and amending the Operating Licence' (the 'Procedures')⁷⁵ which explain how we set and administer the Operating Licence regime and the procedures to be followed.

The Procedures set out considerations to which Ofcom will have regard when setting or amending the Operating Licence, including the relevant legal framework, enforceable nature of Operating Licence conditions and the desirability of ensuring that regulatory conditions are clear and capable of enforcement in the event of non-compliance.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ See Ofcom, [Holding the BBC to account for delivering for audiences: Procedures for setting and amending the operating licence](#), 2017.

⁷⁶ See [The Procedures](#), paragraphs 1.11 to 1.20.