

Valuing PSB: the view from the audience

A deliberative research project carried out by MORI for phase 2 of Ofcom's PSB Review

September 2004

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Key findings.....	7
1: Valuing PSB: the deliberative findings.....	12
2: Programme valuation.....	34
Endnote: perceptions of television and quality.....	54
Appendix A: methodology.....	56

Introduction

Background

Ofcom, the regulator for the UK communications industries, is currently conducting a far-reaching review of public service broadcasting (PSB) in the UK. The Communications Act requires Ofcom to 'carry out a review of the extent to which the public service broadcasters (BBC, ITV, Channel 4, S4C and five), taken together, have provided relevant television services which fulfil the purposes of public service television broadcasting in the UK'.

This review is to be conducted 'with a view to maintaining and strengthening the quality' of PSB in the UK and has been divided into three phases, with two formal public consultations at the end of Phases 1 and 2. *Phase 1: Is television special?* was published in Spring 2004, and this report contributes to *Phase 2: Meeting the digital challenge*, published in September 2004.

Research objectives

Ofcom commissioned MORI to conduct qualitative research to feed into Phase 2 of its review. The primary research objective was to examine

How much value (both monetary and evaluative) viewers place upon PSB¹ output once costs are attached, within a framework of benefit to society as a whole rather than individual personal preference.

Secondary objectives were to examine:

- whether viewers feel that public service broadcasting should be limited to the BBC or whether it should include ITV, Channel 4 and five;
- viewer opinions on different funding structures for public service broadcasting;
- which types of programme are most highly valued once costs are attached to them

¹ In this report, the abbreviation PSB is used throughout for clarity of explanation. However, in the qualitative research the term "public service broadcasting" was never used unless it was raised by participants first, in order to minimise confusion. Rather, discussion focused on the relative strengths and weaknesses of particular programme schedules, acting as a springboard for wider debate.

The research followed a deliberative methodology², for the following key reasons:

- Ability to explain context
- Ability to probe participant responses more fully
- Opportunity to see how views change as a result of more information or understanding of the issues

Methodology

Six deliberative day-long workshops with 20-25 participants in each were held in London, Plymouth, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Belfast and Birmingham during May and June 2004 (see Appendix A for full details of the sample and the day's activities).

The rationale presented to participants was that in the future advertising revenues would no longer be able to fund PSB obligations³ on ITV1, Channel 4 and five, and therefore that the status quo of provision across the main terrestrial broadcasters was not an option for the future: either levels of funding, or levels of obligations, would have to be altered.

On this basis, the respondents had to choose between five different scenarios (see Figure 1) by the end of the day's workshop. Each scenario was represented by an illustrative day's TV schedule of the main terrestrial channels. These illustrative schedules were devised by Ofcom after discussions with all of the relevant broadcasters. Reduced BBC funding was represented by an increase in repeats on BBC1 and BBC2 as well as the replacement of higher-end programming with cheaper programmes. Increased BBC funding was illustrated by increased levels of high-cost drama and news at an even more local level. For ITV, Channel 4 and five, the illustrative schedules included or removed different types of regulated programming such as news, regional news, regional non-news, children's, current affairs, arts and religion.

² A deliberative methodology gives participants increasing amounts of context and explanation at intervals throughout the session, so that participant knowledge is built up gradually and reactions can be thoroughly discussed. See Appendix A for more details

³ See *Phase 1: Is television special?* pp. 18-21 for a breakdown of the variety of PSB obligations across the terrestrial channels

Figure 1: Scenarios of future PSB provision

Schedule ⁴	Funding of BBC	Obligations on ITV1, Channel 4 and five	Public funding cost relative to today	Absolute level of the TV licence fee
A	More than today	More than today	+ 50%	£181
B	As today	As today	+25%	£151
C	As today	None	0	£121
D	Less than today	As today	0	£121
E	Less than today	None	-25%	£91

Participants were given increasing amounts of information about the schedules as the day progressed:

Stand-alone schedules

On the basis of the schedules only, without any additional information, participants were asked both for their own personal preference and the one they thought best for society as a whole.

Explanation of schedules

Participants were told what each schedule represented in broad terms (i.e. that they were indicative of levels of funding for the BBC and obligations on ITV, Channel 4 and five), and asked which, given this information, they thought best for society as a whole.

Proportionate costs of schedules

Participants were told the proportionate cost to society of these schedules, relative to today's funding, e.g. "25% more than today". Participants were asked for the one thought best for society as a whole.

Actual costs

Participants were told the actual possible sums of money and asked for their reaction.

Options for funding

Participants were given the options for funding the different schedules including licence fee, taxation and subscription options, and asked for their reactions.

⁴ Of course, the schedules were not labelled A – E for the participants as otherwise their hierarchy would have been immediately apparent

At each point, participants were required to **choose and justify** which of the different PSB approaches and funding mechanisms they thought would be best for society. In this way, participants were continually encouraged to debate the underlying principle; whether it was more important to keep costs down and/or maintain PSB obligations.

All workshops began with a **future scenario envisaging** exercise which set the context for PSB in the future and encouraged participants to think in terms of society rather than personal choice.

Participants were also asked to decide which types of programming they would prefer to keep or remove on the schedules, once they knew the approximate “social cost” of programme types.

Key findings

Summary

There was broad consensus across all six workshops that:

- PSB output should remain at its current level on the BBC, but some obligations can be reduced for ITV, Channel 4 and five
- This level of provision should be paid for by a licence fee of somewhere between £121 and £151⁵
- From this funding the BBC should receive £121. The other channels should receive the remainder, depending on the cost of their remaining obligations

The deliberative dimension

Stand-alone schedules

Before participants were told anything about what the schedules represented in terms of funding or obligations, there was majority support for more PSB obligations across all channels (represented by schedule A). There was also support for those schedules which represented the status quo on the BBC (represented by schedules B and C).

Explanation of schedules

When the basic principles behind each schedule were explained (e.g. “more expensive than today” “fewer obligations than today”), the preferred option changed to that which represented current PSB levels for slightly more cost (schedule B). Nonetheless, some participants still called for more PSB obligations⁶.

Proportionate costs of schedules

When proportionate costs were given (e.g. “50% more than today”), people looked more favourably on retaining the same level of cost as today, and removing obligations from ITV, Channel 4 and five (schedule C). However, significant numbers still preferred to pay 25% more to keep the programming status quo (schedule B).

⁵ Participants had been reminded from the outset that “the status quo is not an option” – either levels of funding would have to increase, or obligations and PSB output decrease, as a result of the changing digital environment

⁶ Individuals found it hard at this point to link the abstract fact of greater cost with potential sums of money.

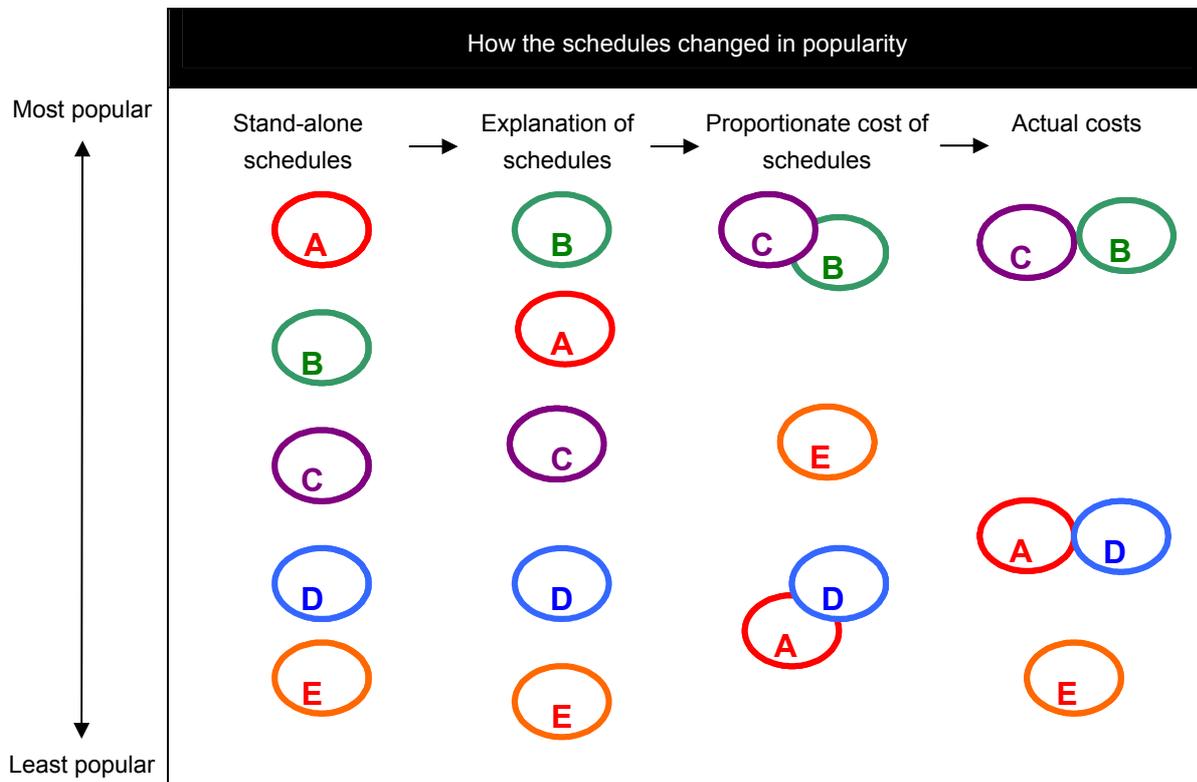
Actual costs

Once actual costs were given (e.g. “licence fee at £151 per year”), two broad viewpoints emerged:

- Just under half of participants believed that a 25% increase in cost would be acceptable to the public in order to maintain the current level of PSB obligations across channels. They believed this represented the best television for society (i.e. schedule B).

Figure 2: The illustrative schedules and summary of changes to their popularity over the day

Schedule	Funding of BBC	Obligations on ITV1, Channel 4 and five	Public funding cost relative to today	Absolute level of the TV licence fee
A	More than today	More than today	+ 50%	£181
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- Just over half of participants thought that it was better to retain today's costing level rather than ask society to contribute more. These people felt that the current PSB obligations on ITV, Channel 4 and five made less overt difference to the level of benefit society gains from PSB in comparison to BBC provision, and therefore chose schedule C.

A compromise between both options was seen by most as palatable, for individuals and for society as a whole. It was felt that this compromise would neither penalise the poorest with large licence fee increases, nor cut obligations too drastically, which could result in less variety and quality in terrestrial television.

Funding mechanisms

The licence fee

The licence fee was seen as the best **compromise** to fund PSB, providing the best value for money for everyone under the fairest and most reliable system. Participants unanimously chose the licence fee as most likely to facilitate the kind of PSB which would benefit society as a whole.

Voluntary subscription

Voluntary subscription was felt to place too much pressure on the individual to choose PSB content, therefore society would risk losing wider social benefits that are not apparent to individuals choosing on an ad hoc basis. There was a belief that voluntary subscription methods would undermine every channel in the long run.

General taxation

General taxation received very little support. There were a variety of reasons for this lack of support. Some felt that taxation would place too much power in the hands of government to determine the future of television. It was feared that this would result in less freedom for the media overall, and possibly to funding being diverted into other areas. There was also much comment that those in paid employment should not be paying for the TV viewing of those not working: a view expressed not least by the unemployed participants themselves.

Role of channels in PSB

Participants were keen to see plurality of programme provision across the channels, to maintain competition and keep up standards. ITV news/current affairs and Channel 4 drama and current affairs were singled out as being examples of good programming which were integral to PSB provision.

That said, participants saw the BBC's role in PSB as vital and, as the discussion progressed, did not want to see the BBC's obligations reduced.

Many participants placed little weight on the differences between the schedules representing the status quo in programming terms (schedule B) and no obligations for ITV, Channel 4 and five (schedule C). This can be explained by the way that ITV, Channel 4 and five tended to be seen as having a primarily 'entertainment' focus while the BBC was seen as having a more 'educative' role. Therefore, the PSB obligations of ITV, Channel 4 and five tended to be missed, or the motivation for showing PSB programmes was assumed to be commercial.

Programme valuation

Across all workshops, news and current affairs, serious documentaries and dramas were felt to be essential. Multi-cultural integration was considered an important element for consideration, and programming that included representations of ethnic minorities was seen as an element that should be common to all terrestrial channels. Participants felt it would be worth paying to preserve these programme genres.

It was also considered important to preserve plurality of provision across channels in the areas of news and current affairs, both to maintain competition and to ensure that different editorial perspectives are allowed airtime.

Therefore, participants accepted the concept of non-BBC channels receiving some public funding if it meant keeping key elements such as news, current affairs, serious and lifestyle documentaries, dramas and programming which reflected multi-cultural Britain.

There was interest in the idea of promoting programming that takes risks, (especially drama and documentaries) although many found it hard to calculate its societal value⁷.

Participants also noted that given the constraints of scheduling and available

⁷ The lively debate which invariably occurred at this point was in itself an illustration of the value of risk-taking dramas like *Shameless* in creating controversy and stimulating debate.

budget, some areas of programming were less vital to supply. Their views acknowledged that for some, such programming was immensely valued (as Ofcom's phase 1 research also showed). However, they felt that either commercial imperatives would ensure the future of such programmes, or that funding and scheduling constraints were such that they were less necessary to provide for the majority.

For example, although soaps were felt to be central to many people's viewing, there was an assumption that they would always be popular enough to continue in a non-protected environment. In the case of arts programming, a feeling emerged that this kind of viewing did not benefit a large enough group within society to warrant public funding. However there was interest from a minority in the idea of more musical programming, across all musical genres.

1. Valuing PSB: the deliberative findings

1.1 Initial reaction to schedules

Participants were first asked to examine the five schedules, which had no costs attached to them. They were prompted on differences in programme type, genre, channel, time of day, and programme origin. All participants made an initial choice about which schedule was preferable to them personally, before discussion moved on to which schedule would be best for society as a whole.

Summary



Schedule A (more PSB programming) was seen to be best for society by about two-thirds of every workshop, because of key elements including:

- no repeats
- high-quality drama
- comedy
- local and regional programming
- national news and current affairs.

A large minority felt that part of PSB's role was to surprise the viewer and promote new thinking in general. Schedule A was chosen by them because of the volume of new documentaries, drama and news which could achieve this.

Channel brands had a role to play in the decision process. Participants' associations with the channels gave rise to perceptions of different kinds of expertise and quality. The BBC was felt to have strength in the areas of wildlife, news, current affairs, while the other three channels were perceived to have a more entertainment focus.

Participants tended to try to find schedules where the channels were seen to do the things they are “best at”, which is why schedule C (no PSB obligation on ITV, Channel 4 and five) and schedule B (status quo) were also popular. This illustrated a desire to perpetuate the status quo; and participants tended to perceive that schedule C as well as schedule B represented the status quo.

Detailed findings

Four key arguments were typically adopted and explored in turn by participants during this exercise. In each workshop the majority would eventually agree that the fourth and final position represented the best for society, although there was always a vocal minority who stayed with positions two and three.

All these arguments were revisited throughout the day. As new information was provided, each workshop group would debate the underlying principles once again. It is therefore worth setting out these positions in some detail, as these views coloured subsequent debates and decisions.

Argument One: The first angle that participants tended to explore when deciding whether a schedule was good for society was to assess its entertainment value. This assessment tended to open the discussion, and was very close to an initial, simple choice of each participant’s own favourite. Retired groups and the very youngest across locations tended to find it particularly hard to move away from simply choosing their personal preference, and tended to justify this personal choice in terms of ‘entertainment’.

Those who enjoyed arts and history programmes went straight for schedule A (more PSB provision), including several in London and Cardiff who claimed only to watch the Discovery channel. Among the youngest, those who claimed to watch only the digital channels, and a proportion of all the DE groups, schedule E (reduced BBC funding and no obligations on ITV, Channel 4 and five) was much more popular. It contained more reality shows and youth soaps like *Hollyoaks*, plus shows like *Killer Tornadoes* which were seen to have good entertainment value.

The more moderate majority chose schedule C (BBC status quo; no obligations on ITV, Channel 4 and five), as both their personal favourite and as the best schedule for society. They perceived that the BBC’s offering on C had fewer repeats, and that the other three channels felt like they offered more pure entertainment in the evenings (*How Clean is Your House*, *The Salon*, *Friends* etc). These were elements they would like to watch themselves.

For all participants in all workshops, the focus of discussion at this stage was upon evening viewing, rather than daytime programming: a reflection of their own viewing habits.

Argument Two: As discussion moved on, some in each workshop asserted that society meant the rule of the majority. Hence entertaining the majority became the most important function of the schedules.

Participants espoused this view very confidently; the idea that television provides for a market of consumers, based on the desires of the majority of viewers, clearly felt familiar and comfortable. The view became popular among about half of each workshop group at this point, and allowed participants to argue that the broadcasting which most benefits society will naturally emerge through the competitive operation of ratings.

At this point, schedule choices were defended based on whichever appeared to be the most popular and which suggested the highest ratings. Overall, participants thought that schedule C (BBC status quo; no obligations on ITV, Channel 4 and five) offered the most popular spread of shows, with some support for schedules D (reduced funding for BBC; status quo for ITV, Channel 4 and five) and E (reduced funding for BBC and no obligations on ITV, Channel 4 and five) specifically because they appeared to focus on majority entertainment. The kinds of programmes and genres mentioned were those which were undeniably popular across all social groups, such as news and *Tonight with Trevor McDonald*. This latter was considered to be populist but to give valuable insight and information about the world, catering for many different audiences in one programme.

The schedules which replaced the ITV evening news with a film felt most appropriate at this point also.

“The film is on for longer, it’s more entertaining and more people would watch it” (Birmingham)

When this view was espoused, a fairly mild and generally informative content across all programming, for everyone, was seen as the ideal, rather than minority interest programmes with specialised or in-depth content. Schedule E was appreciated as it had “fun” programming: plenty of soaps, plus the kind of quizzes and reality shows that suggested a lighter educative content.

“Some people have got no idea of buying a house or something, and if you’ve not got that from school, or you’re not from the same background as other people, then you do need to find out” (Birmingham)

Argument Three: Discussion then tended to evolve to a consideration of society as a set of individuals and widely differing minority groups with different tastes. At this point, participants began to assert that the best schedule for society should ensure provision somewhere during the day for each different group.

Television was seen here as an anti-discrimination tool, which could benefit society by ensuring that each group has a voice. Participants suggested that in the future, different ethnic or cultural groups would have more dedicated programming and even dedicated channels.

Although television was still considered to be entertainment, at this point a large proportion of participants argued that society has a duty to provide entertainment for all its different members.

“There are some old people for whom the telly is just like a lifeline, it’s the only contact they have with the world” (London)

Participants also asserted that television should educate groups about each other, and create social cohesion this way.

“We cook much more inventively now we’ve seen those exotic programmes. I made curried fish in a sauce and I make it all the time now” (Birmingham)

“There’s a discussion programme about Islam late at night. I watch that even though I’m not religious because it’s important, especially with today’s problems that are going on, I think it’s important that it gets talked about” (Birmingham)

Attention tended to turn to local/regional/national programming as representing minority groups, especially programmes in Welsh or Gaelic for Cardiff and Edinburgh.

“I’m such a hypocrite, I don’t speak Welsh but I appreciate people who do. I love S4C, but I don’t understand a word of it!” (Cardiff)

Schedule A (increased PSB programming) enjoyed a resurgence at this point as participants appreciated the national and local news across all channels, feeling that they would cater for local interest groups. Programmes like the D-Day documentary and *Children of Abraham* were also cited as good examples of programming which teach different age groups and religious groups about each other. *Restoration* also contributed to the choice of schedule A, as some thought it could educate viewers about their own locale. Schedule B (the status quo) also became popular due to the perceived variety of programming

on all channels.

Argument Four: Eventually the discussion turned to the social value of television to all in society, and its implicit or explicit role in ongoing education for everyone. For a few in each workshop, this was a passionately-held belief from the start. Most others gradually came to acknowledge through the debate that this view of television might be the best for society (although this was often revised once costs were attached to the schedules later on in the day).

Within this view, PSB was seen as most valuable as a challenge to accepted ideas. This was seen as healthy for society as a whole. Its role would not simply be to provide what individuals or groups say they want.

In Cardiff and Edinburgh there was stronger support for this position than in the other locations. In Cardiff, participants were proud of their education and saw it as the best way to get on in life. For them, praising educative and challenging television was very important, as they felt the benefits personally. In Edinburgh, participants from a higher socio-economic class also prioritised education and were keen to talk about television's power to broaden the mind.

Participants who took this view argued for the benefits of television which takes artistic and financial risks for everyone's benefit. For the majority, the idea of channels taking financial risks was hard to grasp, though most saw a benefit in television which created new genres or broke boundaries. The discussion here tended to focus on particularly original, surprisingly good examples of genres, rather than genres per se.

"I watched Wife Swap and it was quality, I thought afterwards the world wasn't such an ugly place"
(London)

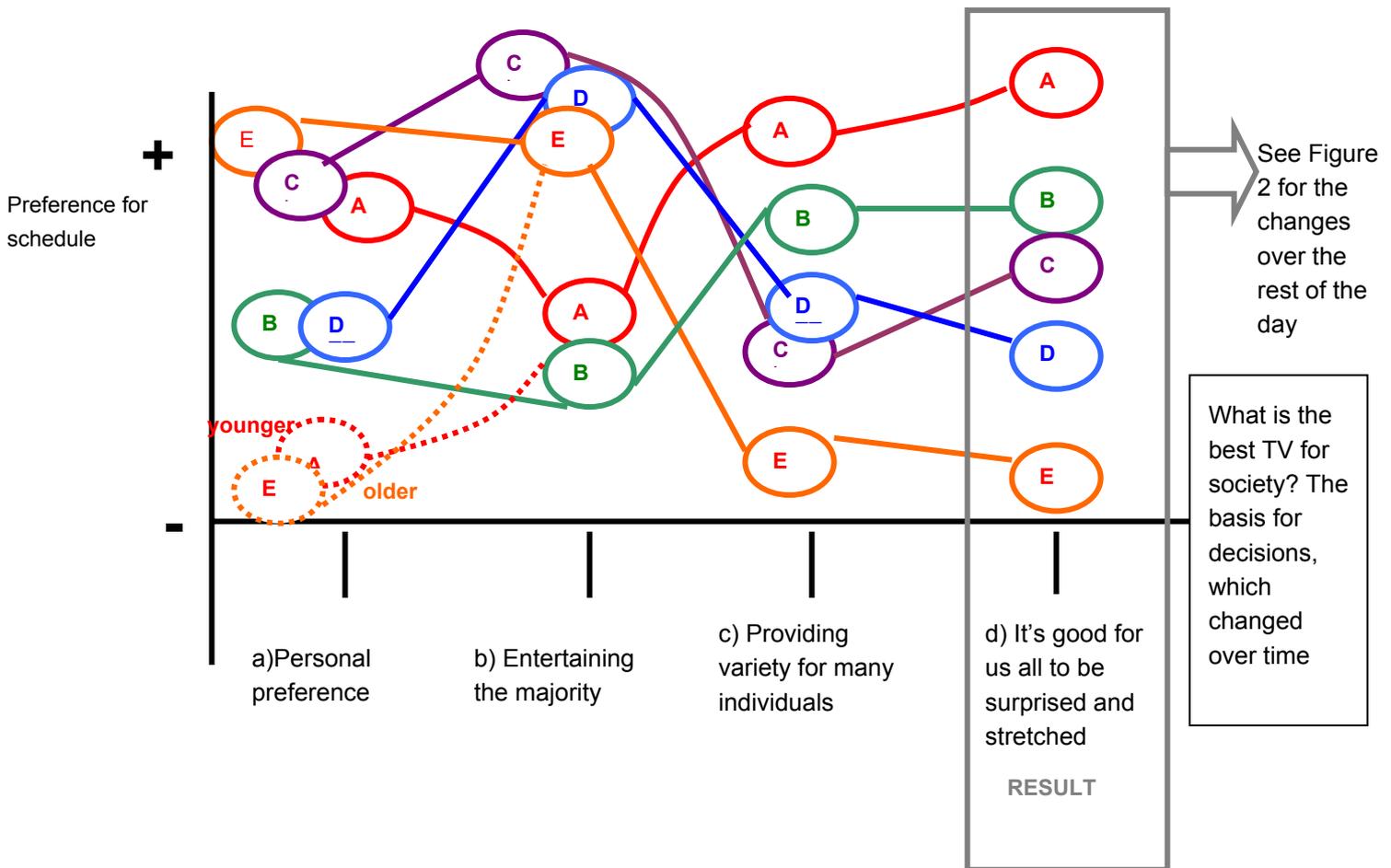
When considering this argument, some participants suggested that the best entertainment programmes have inherent PSB qualities. There was an assumption, among those who argued this point of view, that programmes with public service obligations were "better" – higher quality, better thought through, richer in content. This often led to equating the idea of 'quality' with the idea of PSB, and led many participants to suggest that all terrestrial television would be better, more entertaining, more socially valuable and hence better value for money, if PSB obligations were increased.

Schedule A (increased PSB obligations), then emerged as the best schedule for society overall. It was considered the most "thought provoking and original" schedule in London, Edinburgh and Cardiff because of key documentaries such as *Children of Abraham* and *What the Romans Did for Us*. The BBC's wildlife, science and nature programmes such as *Blue Planet* were also highlighted across the workshops.

“Some kid might watch Blue Planet and end up thinking, it’s given me an idea and I’d like to be a marine biologist” (Birmingham)

In summary, it can be seen from Figure 3 that before costs were attached to the schedules, participants broadly settled for the order of most to least expensive, the more that social issues were considered. There was also a preference for the schedules where BBC’s obligations remained untouched.

Figure 3: The rise and fall of the schedules in the initial reactions exercise



1.2 Explanation of schedules

At this second stage of deliberation, participants were provided with the following information⁸.

Schedule	Funding of BBC	Obligations on ITV1, Channel 4 and five
A	More than today	More than today
B	As today	As today
C	As today	None
D	Less than today	As today
E	Less than today	None

Summary



At this stage, the schedule which represented the status quo in programming terms became more popular, although not by a significant margin: many still maintained that more PSB provision would be a better option for society in future, especially in Edinburgh.

Adding these relative costs provided little surprise for participants as they had assumed that schedule A was more expensive than schedule E.

For some, the new information served only to reinforce society's need for schedules A or B. Various participants who had not before thought schedule A best for society sometimes now changed their opinion and supported it. This may have been because it appeared more expensive and therefore higher quality.

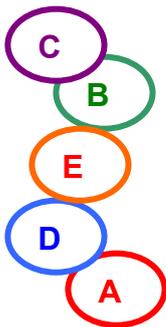
⁸ The London workshop participants also saw schedules R and I, where the costs were in between B and C/D. These schedules did not affect the overall trade-off so were removed after these workshop

1.3 Proportionate cost

In this workshop exercise, participants were informed of the proportionate costs of the schedules. Moderators took care to remind them that these costs were adjusted for inflation and represented money in today's prices.

Schedule	Funding of BBC	Obligations on ITV1, Channel 4 and five	Public funding cost relative to today
A	More than today	More than today	+ 50%
B	As today	As today	+25%
C	As today	None	0
D	Less than today	As today	0
E	Less than today	None	-25%

Summary



Participants were shocked when they heard the proportionate costs of the schedules, especially the news that more revenue would be needed to retain the status quo in programming terms.

Participants felt that keeping costs down was also important for society, and reconsidered the choice of schedule A, the most expensive option.

Schedule B emerged as a good compromise for about half, who felt it was important to keep things the same, especially on the BBC.

Schedule C emerged as a fair compromise for a large proportion of the remaining participants. They too wished to keep things the same, but felt that the 25% increase associated with B was too much to pay for retaining obligations on ITV, Channel 4 and five. They perceived that schedule C was not vastly different from B, and also felt that the removal of obligations on ITV, Channel 4 and five would have little impact.

Detailed findings

Reactions from participants to the information about proportionate costs were strong. The level of increase was a shock for most, especially coupled with the news that an increased level of funding would be needed to maintain the status quo.

Opinions regarding the value of the different schedules changed. Participants began to debate whether it was fair to impose more social obligations on individuals – even if those individuals would benefit from them - if they were also required to pay more for those obligations. Many returned at this point to argument position two, the free market view of television, where both high ratings and consumer choice are the most important indices of social value and success.

“It’s the same as trainers. If you want to wear adidas trainers you pay £70, if you want to wear cheap trainers you pay £10; but it’s your choice. Why should we be forced to pay, we should all choose individually” (Birmingham)

Therefore a vocal minority claimed that schedule E became the best option, because it was the cheapest. The costs were immediately compared with the costs of Sky. For some in Plymouth, the price of Sky made the proposed increases for terrestrial television seem less burdensome.

“Then again, you’ve got a lot of people who think nothing of spending £40 or £50 a month on Sky” (Plymouth)

For others, comparing terrestrial television with Sky worked to the disadvantage of terrestrial, which was felt to be expensive but not as rich in variety and quality.

“But the price of Sky is why they wouldn’t want to pay so much for this mess” (Plymouth)

“If you paid less you’d get crappy programmes on BBC1. But that doesn’t matter, because if you want to watch documentaries you can watch them on the documentary channel. If you want to watch a movie you can watch it on the movie channel. We’ve paid for that already” (Birmingham)

However, the decision to re-order the schedules was not simply based on a desire for the cheapest option. About half in total changed from schedule A to B, feeling that a small increase in cost would be worthwhile to maintain the status quo. A large proportion also settled on schedule C. They too wished to maintain the status quo, but claimed they were not able to tell from the

illustrative schedule how the lack of funding had affected the output on ITV, Channel 4 and five. They felt that they would not feel the loss if the obligations on these channels were reduced or cut in future. Thus, these participants traded some current benefits whose value they did not perceive (the PSB elements on ITV, Channel 4 and five) for the sake of a 25% cost saving, which felt like a more concrete benefit to society⁹.

A variety of further reasons were given for the switch to schedules B and C:-

- Any cost would be in the future, so was not seen as great (“a 25% increase over the next 10 years is not a lot”). The cost of schedule A (50% more than today), however, was felt to be more prohibitive
- Quality, in the sense of high production values and visible money spent, seemed apparent from B and C, and was seen to be ‘enough’ for society as a whole
- Schedule B also fulfilled the need for variety and popularity

“I think [B] would be the best one because it seems to give a well rounded schedule, something for everybody there” (Birmingham)
- Both B and C were seen to have some original programming, especially on the BBC.

“if you compare [B] to the cheap [schedule], the cheap [schedules] seem to be full of repeats all over the place” (Plymouth)

Overall, once these proportionate costs were introduced, participants felt more comfortable with the idea of paying to ensure the BBC stayed the same than they did with the idea of paying to maintain or improve the other channels. Most believed that the BBC had begun life as a public service broadcaster first and foremost, and therefore had a greater claim on funds for PSB than other channels.

“If it came down to money, I’d be happy for the BBC to do their stuff and the rest would be like satellite channels” (London)

However, as this argument emerged, some expressed a fear that if all obligations on other channels were removed, the BBC might in future become associated only with “worthy” programmes, and lose its position at the heart of television life – the benefits of plural provision were stressed.

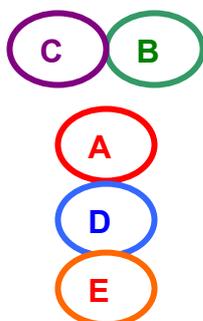
⁹ Across the workshops, little meaningful difference was seen between the programming of schedule B, the status quo, and the programming of schedule C. This highlights the way in which the PSB obligations of ITV, Channel 4 and five currently do not seem to play a salient part in their brand imagery for these participants. This does not mean that the PSB elements of ITV, Channel 4 and five are automatically less valuable as genres, or for society. Instead, it suggests that participants were not used to imagining that these ‘commercial’ channels have obligations to produce programming for any reason other than commercial imperatives; so they found it hard to imagine what society might lose if obligations were reduced.

1.4 Actual cost

Towards the end of the workshops, participants were presented with some actual figures for the options they had chosen. Participants were asked whether their choice of schedule changed as a result of this additional information.

Schedule	Funding of BBC	Obligations on ITV1, Channel 4 and five	Public funding cost relative to today	Absolute level of the TV licence fee
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Summary



A *compromise* between schedules C and B, with reduced obligations on ITV, Channel 4 and five together with a less than £30 licence fee increase, was palatable to virtually all participants as a final decision.

Schedule C (no obligations on ITV, Channel 4 or five) was seen as the best PSB approach for the majority, because of the fact that public funding costs would not increase. This was a particularly popular choice among those with a 'free market' approach to television.

Schedule B (status quo) emerged as the best option for a large minority who

believed that a £30 licence fee increase would be affordable for most, provide the greatest social benefit and be the best value for money. B was the preferred compromise for those who believed that PSB should be educative, yet did not want to pass on costs to poorer members of society.

All choice of PSB strategies reflected the desire to keep the BBC status quo, whatever the funding method. Even at this stage, when actual costs to individuals were introduced, there was no desire to pay less if it meant cutting BBC obligations.

Detailed findings

When the principle of removing obligations from ITV, Channel 4 and five was discussed in terms of actual sums of money, some participants began to appreciate the trade-off more viscerally, and appreciate the difficult financial decision that these channels would have to make. The funding option discussion in this way encouraged a revisiting of some of the debates about the nature of quality and the nature of PSB.

“Is a good programme a programme that a lot of people watch? I don’t think so; 18 million people watch Coronation Street every day, but I don’t think it’s a good show. That’s why I’m thinking it’s a serious problem, taking obligations away from Channel Three, Four and five. If you do take the obligations away, you’re asking them to keep things as they are, or else do something else and make a lot more money from it. As a company they’re going to have to do what makes them a lot more money” (Belfast)

Overall, once they had discussed the different funding approaches and mechanisms, participants tended to argue for the approach set out in schedule C (BBC status quo; no obligations on ITV, Channel 4 and five). A proportion of those who had supported B were positively affected by seeing the cost option for C – no increase, in hard figures. Noticing this, they became more prepared to accept that losing obligations on ITV, Channel 4 and five would be worth it.

“I just think it’s not too big a sacrifice to lose the obligations on Three, Four and five for 25%” (Birmingham)

Those who emerged in this debate as schedule C supporters were often those participants who had decided on a free market approach to television, feeling that this would deliver television which was best for the majority. They were happy to see the free market in operation and were fundamentally uncomfortable about giving money to channels which also received money through advertising.

Schedule C supporters also commented at this point that if ITV, Channel 4 and five received no money, the need to drive up ratings and show popular programmes would encourage them to innovate and increase quality in terms of originality and high production values. They felt that society's refusal to contribute money would not harm these channels, and might even produce positive results. This group believed that a world where schedule C was shown on television would not feel very different from the current status quo, and might even result in better television on ITV, Channel 4 and five, at no increased cost to society.

"To be honest the majority of their programmes that they're showing now are obviously what they suspect people like to watch anyway - so I don't think they are going to change that drastically"
(Cardiff)

These participants also felt they could rely on the BBC to show programmes that were good for society, so long as the licence fee was spent on the BBC.

"ITV, Channel 4 and five can choose what they want to show, which is good, and you've still got BBC1 and 2 which have got good programmes. They're still showing the kids' programmes and the news and everything else" (Birmingham)

Most of the remaining participants supported schedule B, and did not change their views on seeing the actual costs of funding.

Although seeing the licence fee increased by £30 a year was an initial shock for some, participants often started thinking about the increase in licence fee on a monthly or even weekly basis, where the increased costs became far more palatable and affordable.

"You could waste 75p on anything, and we're not talking a vast amount of money are we?"(Cardiff)

"If it was 25% more that wouldn't bother me, because it's £3 or something on top of your licence fee, which you won't notice. It's worth paying that little bit extra, to have a balance - of news, for example. If you only have news on one channel, you could end up with a very strong bias and you wouldn't have anything to benchmark it against"
(London)

Notwithstanding, a number of participants who had chosen schedule B were clearly unhappy about paying extra money once this funding option was

presented. These participants tended to be those on very low incomes, who felt fairly powerless in social terms, unable to afford an extra £30 a year and did not think the trade-off in terms of obligations was worthwhile. They tended to default to schedule C, at the final point of decision.

“So how are we going to pay £151 for it? I can’t see the point. If I had to feed myself, I’d feed myself first before I’d watch a box in the corner. We’ve got no money coming in, what can we do?”(Plymouth)

“It’s too much, when you pay cable as well, because you’re over a barrel, because your kids want it ... There’s got to be a cut-off line we can’t go above ... I personally can’t afford [the schedule B option]” (Birmingham)

A similar process occurred with regard to the small minority who had supported schedule A throughout. On considering the costs of A to the poorest in society, this minority compromised by preserving the status quo with B. These participants acknowledged that even a £30 increase might seem a lot to some people, but maintained that this kind of figure would be necessary in social terms, as they firmly believed that it was best for society to maintain as many PSB obligations as could be afforded.

There was little support for schedules D or E once participants had absorbed all relevant information, including funding options. Despite negative attitudes about the BBC’s perceived bureaucracy and inefficiencies, there was little support for taking money away from the BBC, even when this money could go to ITV, Channel 4 and five to ensure their obligations (schedule D).

1.4 Types of funding

Summary

The licence fee was seen as the best compromise solution, despite some initial, spontaneous, negative response to this method. It was seen as a low-risk, tried and tested method, and the fairest way to achieve the necessary funds (whether schedule B or C was the preferred option).

General taxation models were rejected by almost all. The concept immediately led to television being cast as an entertaining individual luxury rather than a social good.

There was a belief that voluntary subscription would undermine the BBC in the long run.

On a conceptual level, participants were happy for revenue gained through the licence fee to be shared across the BBC and other channels. Should this mechanism be introduced, however, they felt that the general public would require strong assurances that the PSB obligations on other channels, paid for by the public in this way, were being properly enforced.

Attitudes towards the licence fee

Participants were recruited so as to include a spread of positive and negative attitudes towards the licence fee. Those with negative attitudes were often quite critical of the licence fee at various points of the day, with comments such as *“the licence fee, it’s a disgrace”* and *“I never watch the BBC so why do I have to pay it?”*. These negative attitudes often came from heavy cable and satellite viewers who claimed not to watch the BBC and felt that it was unfair that they should pay for something that they chose not to watch.

Negative attitudes were also related to administrative issues and bad experiences with the licence fee. There was a general perception that the licence fee was not enforced as often or as strictly as it should be, and that there were large numbers of people *“getting away without paying”*. A number of participants were quite resentful that it seemed possible to avoid the licence fee, especially if they themselves had been the victim of an administrative mistake. It was pointed out that if payment of the licence fee was more strictly enforced, then there would be more money available for television.

There were also positive views about the licence fee. It was felt to increase the BBC’s accountability and impartiality, due to the fact that it is a system which provides a revenue stream independent of government.

Knowledge about what the licence fee was used for varied. A small minority of participants thought a proportion of the licence fee went to the other television companies in addition to the BBC. There was some knowledge that pensioners over 75 currently do not have to pay for their licence fee and this was welcomed by middle aged and older participants in particular. Indeed, it was felt that this should be widened to all people who have retired.

Despite negative attitudes towards the licence fee and some gaps in knowledge around the system, once the other funding options were explored, it seemed to many participants to be the best way to fund television, whatever their choice of schedule.

There were many suggestions that it might be better to stick with the method of funding currently in place, rather than try a new form of funding which could have greater associated risks. There was some indication of a lack of trust in the relevant authorities to administer new methods correctly.

Attitudes towards sharing licence fee funds between the channels

The concept of dividing the licence fee between the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and five was in itself not a problematic idea. It was pointed out, however, in Cardiff, Belfast and Plymouth that five was not available for everyone to watch and therefore it might not “deserve” so much money.

If ITV, Channel 4 and five were to keep their obligations, it was felt important that the regulatory bodies made sure these channels kept to their obligations and were accountable for the extra money they were getting.

*“If there was just more money going in fat cats’ pockets then I’d have a problem with it. I’d need to know that it was ‘justified’ money, as it were”
(Cardiff)*

Attitudes towards tax

There was almost universal criticism of this method of funding. This was primarily because funding for television would therefore become a progressive tax, whereby people on higher incomes would pay more and those on lower incomes less. This provoked an extremely strong reaction from participants. It prompted the majority quickly to adopt the position that television is primarily an entertainment medium – even those who had been arguing for the social value of television only moments before.

“I’m not going to pay for someone’s entertainment, that’s like me working and paying for them to have a drink!.... Because that’s all it is at the end of the day, it’s entertainment isn’t it?” (Cardiff)

In particular, participants did not want to pay for those who were unemployed or “single mums with lots of kids” “to watch TV all day”. There was a sense that those who were working hard would end up subsidising those who had the opportunity to watch far more television than people in work. It was also believed that access to free television might be a disincentive to find work.

“Well it seems a very unfair system because Joe Bloggs who doesn’t want to work and watches telly all day and the fella next door who works very hard to keep his family, he doesn’t have time to watch the telly, he’s subsidising the one sat and watching all day, it’s totally unfair isn’t it?” (Cardiff)

As well as a strong image of television as entertainment, a range of negative imagery and metaphor to do with the television also emerged at this point in the workshops, including images of passivity, viewers lying on the couch, feelings of disempowerment and inaction, associations of laziness and worries over obesity and ill health. This was common across socio-economic groups, ages and locations.

This negative side to television viewing prompted those who were on benefits to stress that they did not feel that they should be entitled to pay less for television simply because they were currently not working. Accepting more ‘state handouts’ for television made them feel uncomfortable. The idea seemed to engender a mental image of *themselves* as lazy social freeloaders.

“I’m on benefits now but I won’t be forever – when the kids are older I’ll be working, and then I won’t want to pay for this” (Birmingham)

During this part of the discussion, television was seen as a ‘luxury’ rather than a universal service such as the NHS or education. Participants argued that these other public services have social responsibilities, contribute to the greater good, and were not something people could go without, whereas people could go without having a television. It was felt that access to television programmes was not a ‘right’ like access to education or the health service. There was also scepticism about whether television alone would provide useful education for someone who had no real motivation to educate themselves. Many asserted that there were plenty of other routes available to the keen student seeking knowledge, and hence no need for society to provide television to do this job.

“Programmes are good, but at the end of the day, years ago when there wasn’t TV, people had to read books to get information, so although I do watch a lot of TV myself, there’s no real physical need for it” (Belfast)

The only members of society who could be imagined sitting and watching free television without social stigma were pensioners. They had ‘worked hard all their lives’ and were felt to have paid their dues to society. Participants often gave examples of very frail elderly people who had few options when it came to entertainment, and thus could not be called lazy. The majority were happy with the idea of paying for this group’s television. However this argument resulted in a call for the licence fee to be waived for pensioners; it did not increase support for a general taxation approach.

There were other concerns about this method of funding, beyond the principles involved. These included:

- A belief that this system was not transparent enough and that the Government might divert funds away from television to other areas of spending;

“I pay a hell of a lot of income tax, but I don’t know where my money goes to, at least if I buy that licence I have given the money to the post office, and they will pass it on to the television company” (Plymouth)

- A perception that tax funding would lead to more Government influence on broadcasting and curtail television companies’ independence. This was particularly pertinent in Belfast, where participants were concerned that government already biases and controls the media to some degree;
- Concern that, because people with higher incomes would end up paying more for television, these people would have more influence and control over what is broadcast;
- Negative associations with the word ‘taxation’; in particular, an emotionally jarring contradiction between conceptions of taxation and ideas of entertainment;
- Concern that the system would not be fine-tuned enough to tax the right people, as people who choose not to have a television in their household will also pay for what is broadcast.

However, within each workshop there were lone dissenters who preferred a taxation approach to funding. They tended to offer the following reasons:

- A progressive system would be fairer than a flat household fee. For example, one participant believed that there were a large number of very rich pensioners who were getting licences free;
- Any increase in taxation to pay for television would seem like “a drop in the ocean” for wealthy people, and therefore it would be a fairer approach;
- Because taxation is deducted at source, then the money being paid is less likely to be noticed in comparison with a licence fee;

- “Deserving” pensioners on low incomes would end up paying nothing or very little for television;
- A taxation model might improve the range and quality of programmes broadcast as television companies would have to ‘prove themselves’ to government;
- That television does have a positive role in educating and informing people, and the least well off in society should get access to this information source as a matter of principle.

“Because of television, people are a lot more educated than they were, and more aware of what’s going on around the world. If you start taking that away from people, because they can’t afford it ... people who have money can pay for information from television, but people who haven’t can’t get it, and they have to read the newspapers, or they have to read a book. Everyone should be entitled to free information. If it means that, because I’m richer I’m paying a bit more so someone can watch TV, I don’t mind” (Belfast)

“Everybody’s been skint, I’ve had absolutely nothing, and fortunately people have paid taxes to help me. Now, I work full time and work my bloody arse off, and I don’t mind paying taxes to help other people” (Plymouth)

Attitudes towards monthly subscription

Subscription as a funding approach initially appealed to many participants, particularly those who claimed not to watch certain terrestrial channels or were subscribers to a service already. Participants stated that the prime advantage of this mechanism was that people would only pay for what they wanted to watch.

This option was welcomed by those with strong free market principles. Although they were very much in the minority, they did not change their opinions even when the debate as a whole turned to the perceived disadvantages of this method.

The majority of participants tended to discount this method of funding once they began to consider possible disadvantages. They pointed out that not everyone in the UK would be likely to pay for the five terrestrial channels; a certain proportion would always opt out. Therefore they were concerned that people who wanted to watch the BBC and the other terrestrial channels would

actually end up paying more than they would under other funding options, as they would have to cover the costs of the whole current service on their own.

Alternatively, participants believed that with fewer people paying for the service, there would be less money coming in for the broadcasters and therefore quality of programmes would diminish. Furthermore, these participants noted that funding could become uncertain, as subscriptions might be quite variable from month to month, so that broadcasters could not rely on continuity of revenue stream.

“On the surface it looks good. But when you explain that if fewer people pay, you’re either going to get a reduced service or the fees are going to go up, it’s a non-starter with me” (Cardiff)

“This is very dangerous, people will say ‘I don’t want to bother with this, don’t want to bother with that, I won’t pay for it’, and the channels would end up bankrupt” (Plymouth)

All participants were also concerned that this option would be hard to enforce. It was felt that the licence fee already had administrative processes in place and that any new form of funding would be difficult and costly to set up.

“Bureaucracy again, here we are, creating a lot more paperwork, a lot more hassle, there’s a lot more people sitting on their arses in chairs filling in forms for this monthly subscription. That money is not being put back into programmes, it’s paying administrative fees” (Birmingham)

A significant proportion of participants across locations also thought that voluntary subscription would discourage risk-taking in programme making, as broadcasters would make safe formulaic programmes to ensure that subscriptions remained high. They asserted also that a subscription to channels in advance of watching television would mean that people would not learn what the channels in general were showing. Therefore viewers in this situation would be less likely to ‘stumble onto a good programme’, which was seen to be one of the valuable benefits of the current system.

Finally, the vocal minority who consistently argued for schedule A also argued against monthly subscription on the grounds of principle. They pointed out that this method would mean that television was no longer a universal right for all and all the societal benefits of television would be lost.

Attitudes towards pay-per-view

Although pay-per-view was not a funding option presented directly to participants, it often came up as a spontaneous funding suggestion; both in terms of paying per hour for channels, and paying to view individual shows.

“Through a pipeline of some sort; you just pay for what you use, like your gas or electricity or water rates. I’ve got a water meter and just pay for what I use. You could have little blocks on the telly to put your money in” (Cardiff)

This was often initially a popular suggestion, as it was felt that the technology would minimise fraud and stop non-payers cheating on the licence fee. It would also mean that the most popular programmes would inevitably be shown on the channels.

However, as with voluntary subscription, a large number of disadvantages became apparent as people considered this option further. Again the principal objection was that it was felt to be far more expensive in the long run, even if each programme was only costed at nominal value.

“If you talk about 50 pence per programme, if you watched television for one hour per day that’s £7 a week which is £364, or something, a year. That’s massively more than the television licence. And it’s only one hour a day!” (Edinburgh)

“Six programmes a night, seven nights a week, that’s like ... 54 quid a month!” (Belfast)

The disadvantages associated with voluntary monthly subscription were also felt to be true of this option. Participants mentioned that broadcasters might face uncertainty in terms of income; they would be less likely to take risks; there would be less diversity and innovation in programmes; there would be administrative difficulties and the viewer would be unable to flick through channels and discover a new programme.

Attitudes towards further options

Participants often attempted to think of other ways in which channels could be funded. There were some suggestions of mixed versions of funding such as subscription together with a reduced licence fee, although these were seen as quite complex. A common suggestion was for the BBC to accept advertising or programme sponsorship. Although this met with some support, once it was pointed out that there was only a finite amount of advertising revenue, and that this might reduce the income received by the other channels, participants

tended to discount this idea.

A small number of participants in several discussions also pointed out that, although the obligations meant that ITV *et al* were making less profit than they otherwise would do, they were still making enough profit for shareholders and would continue to do so in the future. They therefore could not understand why ITV, Channel 4 and five needed subsidising.

2. Programme valuation

To gain further insight into participants' views of the value of terrestrial television, as part of the day's activities they were asked to act as "schedulers" themselves, and make some "hard choice" decisions about which types of programme ought to be kept or removed from the schedules. They were given an indication of the approximate costs to society of the PSB programmes on schedule B (representing the status quo of provision), and asked to remove a set amount of costs, forcing them to make trade-off decisions about the types of programme they felt were vital and those which could acceptably be removed. Again, the value of this exercise was as much in the discussion and debate around choices as in the final decisions made.

Summary

When costs were placed beside individual programmes, participants' preferred solution was for the BBC to retain the status quo. In terms of genres, it could carry on providing drama, science and nature programming, and some religious provision, including religious documentaries, which the other channels might not need to provide. The BBC was seen to be the 'best' at PSB output in general.

To keep costs down, most participants were in favour of cutting programme provision on ITV, Channel 4 and five. However they felt that certain genres were more important to keep on certain channels:-

- ITV: films, sport, news, current affairs
- Channel 4: news, documentaries
- five: documentaries

Participants chose to preserve plurality of provision across channels in the areas of news and current affairs and, for some, sport.

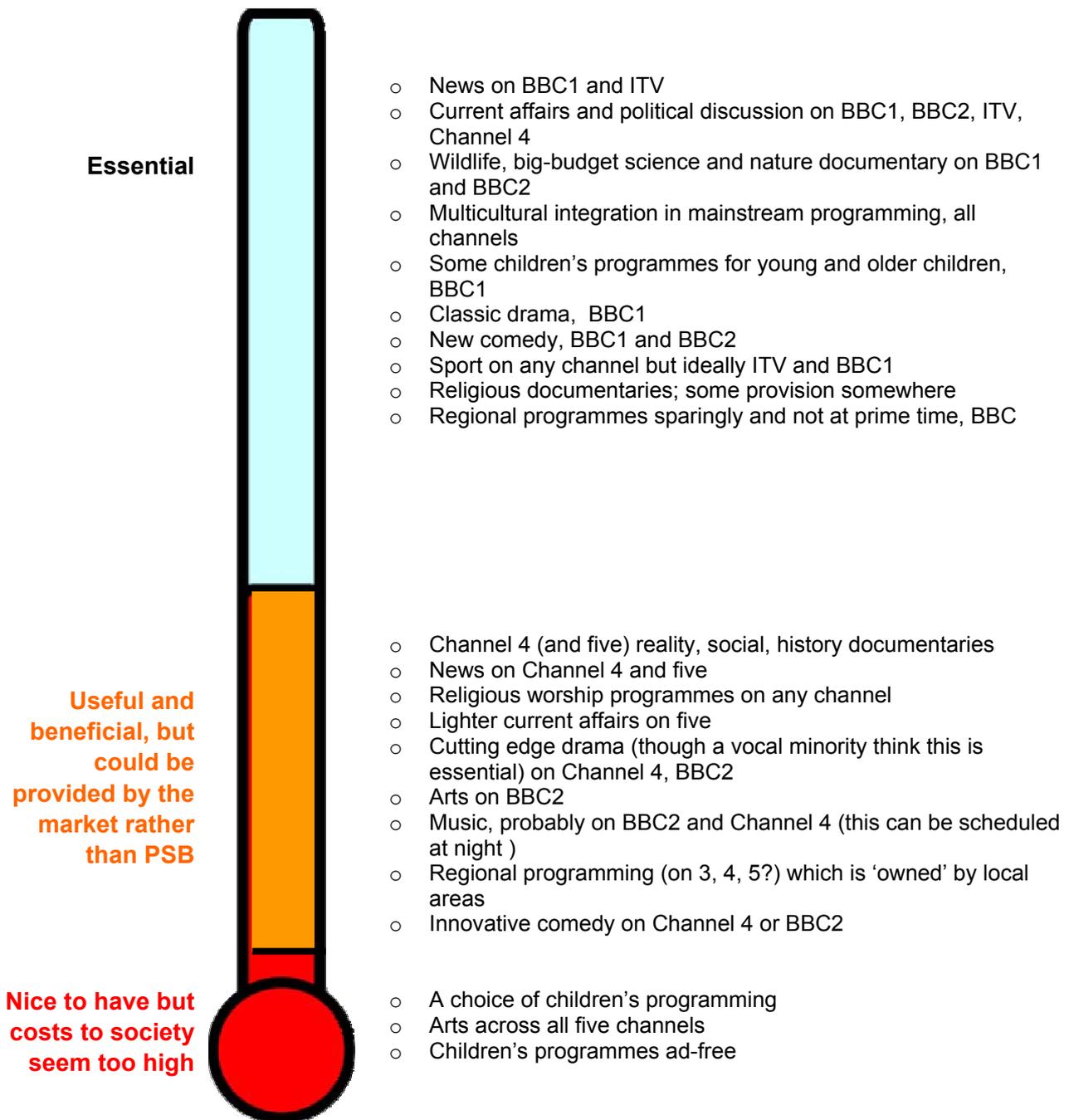
There was a feeling that other elements of PSB would be provided by the marketplace, either by the commercial channels of today or the digital channels of today / the future. Therefore these were not seen as requiring public intervention or support. These included:-

- Soap operas
- Reality shows

- Some sport
- Comedy

In the case of arts programming, a feeling emerged that this kind of viewing did not benefit a large enough group within society to warrant public funding. However there was interest from a minority in the idea of more musical programming, across all musical genres.

Figure 4: Most valued elements of programming/ genres



Detailed findings

Scheduling and channel competitiveness issues

It is of note that the time of day at which a programme was scheduled affected its perceived value. Although participants were encouraged to look beyond individual programmes in individual slots on particular channels, the time-slot of a programme was still mentioned frequently as an indication of how socially valuable a programme might be.

There was an ongoing debate in Plymouth about the value of having revision programmes such as *BiteSize* on late at night. Some saw this as inadequate provision (because young people can't stay up and see it). Others viewed it as a sensible option (because it can be recorded, without affecting prime time schedules).

Similarly, timetabling clashes were frequently invoked as unnecessary. When news was on at the same time on different channels, some participants removed some of the news programmes as a spontaneous reaction, before considering the value of that news or the channel's news output.

In all the workshops, participants had envisaged future scenarios which involved more shift work, and more flexible entertainment to provide for this. Despite this, participants still felt that prime time on all five channels was the best place for majority entertainment. Although prime-time programmes could have a social benefit, all participants felt that they should have a primarily competitive, entertaining remit.

Some social benefit was perceived in having five terrestrial channels which are smart and up-to-date, and which work hard to keep and involve viewers. A level of competition was felt to contribute to this. Retaining programming which maintained each channel's expertise, and a feeling of excitement around each channel, was therefore an important feature of the trade-off.

Participants wanted to avoid the situation where channels could have an automatic right to money, though, as they felt this would not spur them on to great efforts.

Repeats

Some repeats are considered beneficial. “Good classic repeats”, of high quality programming (such as *Wildlife on Two*) or much loved shows (like *Only Fools and Horses*), were considered to have an important place in the BBC’s social remit. The BBC (and ITV to some degree) were seen as guardians of the nation’s cultural heritage, making it important to see some programmes from the past. Older dramas like *The Onedin Line*, *I, Claudius* and *Brideshead Revisited* were mentioned, especially by the older participants in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Plymouth.

There was also interest in repeats of current high quality programming soon after their original airing, to make sure that everyone had had the chance to see them. Participants’ vision of a more fragmented, flexible future society meant that the need for this would only increase in future.

Some repeats on the BBC were seen as a fair compromise by all, saving money so that programmes such as original big-budget nature shows and current affairs could be retained.

However too many repeats were not felt to be in the public interest. Too many repeats might adversely affect perceptions of channel brands and, more seriously, might reflect badly on British television as a whole. Repeats were seen as the flag of defeat in the ratings war, especially for BBC2 (which had a number of repeats on schedules D and E). These repeats suggested to participants that the channel was not investing in its future. Participants felt that this negative image would be worse for the BBC than for the other channels, as the BBC stood for British television and needed to send a strong signal of originality and quality to the rest of the world.

“If it’s all repeats now, what will we be watching in ten years’ time?” (Cardiff)

News

News was seen as the most socially-essential element of terrestrial television. A variety in the supply of news programming was held to be important for democracy. The news on the three commercially-funded channels plus the BBC provision was seen to provide a valuable voice against bias, and to give a useful variation of views on public matters. The role of the other three channels was especially important in Belfast, where the BBC was suspected of having overly-strong links with government. Others knew that five news and Channel 4 news had adopted new styles and “re-branded” the idea of terrestrial news in recent years. These participants were keen to preserve the climate of competition.

Notwithstanding, there was also a strong feeling that there was no need to fund a great number of bulletins through the day across all the channels.

Most groups retained BBC1 and ITV news in the later evening, as the 'main evening news'. It was also felt to be important to preserve some news throughout the day on these channels. The news on five was often cut as the scheduling of it twice at 5.30 and 7pm was felt to be too much. Some also questioned the value of five news, on the grounds that reception for the channel could still be patchy in some areas of the country.

To retain plural provision across channels in addition to ITV and the BBC, most chose to keep either five news in the early afternoon or Channel 4 news at 7pm.

Regional and local news

The idea of local news and regional news was warmly welcomed across all the workshops. However, it was also viewed as an occasional luxury which need not necessarily be present on channels every day.

There was no call for regional or local news programming to be covered by more than one channel. Issues of bias and spin, felt to be so important in relation to national news, were felt less relevant to the local or regional newsroom.

Even the frequency of regional/national news was questioned. In Edinburgh participants cut *Reporting Scotland* at 6.30 pm and 10.30 pm, saying that one showing was enough. Moderation was the key principle here – participants saw no need for constant updates in the field of local news, not least because the subject matter was rarely of vital interest:-

*“They put a load of crap on local news anyway.
Cat’s drowned in a pond. You wouldn’t care.
Unless it was your cat” (Birmingham)*

Very local news was universally felt to be too great an indulgence, and most suggested that if there were to be very local/local and regional news, this would be too much. There were also question marks over whether there would be enough local incident to fill a daily TV bulletin.

However, for those who lived in cities, the idea of city rather than regional news was appealing. Many of the participants from Cardiff, Birmingham and Edinburgh felt they suffered from watching regional news about areas they did not feel were very local. They were positive about the idea of some city-wide news, especially if this could be provided as an occasional substitute for news covering the wider region.

Regional /national programming (other than news)

Most participants initially said they would retain an element of regional programming, and justified this on the principle of variety - retaining programmes just in case a minority group wanted to watch. Participants counted regional programming as highly relevant for the society of the country as a whole, due to its informative content and role in maintaining social cohesion locally.

That said, while participants agreed that these programmes could have a place somewhere in the week, they thought these would not need to be shown often or at prime time. There were two opposing needs: the need to provide variety for every social group, and the need to ensure that prime time television appeals to the broad majority of viewers.

It was felt to be a potentially more entertaining use of regional PSB obligations to make local dramas like *River City* in Scotland, as programmes like these can do two jobs at once. Firstly, they are felt to shine a light on a particular region and inform viewers about events and atmosphere there. Secondly, they are believed to provide entertaining drama in their own right, enhancing the range of modern drama available to viewers.

A small number of participants across all workshops also supported the idea of local docu-dramas like *Bailiffs* in London. They felt that this example in particular suggested the detail of London life, and was a good use of the reality show format for that reason. Its location was seen to add an extra layer of entertainment and information and prevented the programme seeming simply voyeuristic.

Current affairs

This genre was felt to be central to PSB. Current affairs programmes were perceived to be valuable as they shed new light on contemporary politics, and investigated and uncovered corruption.

Responses here resembled the response to news - there appeared to be a plethora of provision currently, and so there might be scope to reduce this in order to save money. Discussion around individual examples of the genre illustrated the extent to which particular journalists, channel brands and production styles influenced participants' perception of the social value of the genre as a whole.

The BBC's current affairs provision was supported by a good proportion of participants, even when they were asked to reduce costs dramatically. However, *Tonight with Trevor McDonald*, on ITV, was felt by the vast majority to be the most socially valuable example of current affairs - entertaining, of

interest to the majority and informative. Two contrasting points of view emerged. Firstly, that the BBC had expertise in current affairs, and hence should be given more funds to show this genre; secondly, a belief that socially valuable programming should appeal to the majority, which pointed towards the *Tonight* approach.

“Trevor McDonald’s not as heavy as the BBC, so it’s better to have him” (Belfast)

The decision for most was that a range of current affairs across channels would be the most socially valuable, and that the essential elements should be some BBC provision and some ITV provision of the *Tonight* type.

It was often argued that lighter debate or more populist current affairs such as *The Wright Stuff* was important, but ought to be considered separately. Participants argued that these shows appealed to different audiences at different times and therefore represented a different kind of PSB.

In each workshop, especially among ABC1 social groups, a minority of participants always chose to add more current affairs, discussion and debate shows into the schedules in general, and argued that these would be socially valuable and worth the extra money.

In the discussion around *Dispatches*, a minority of participants expressed the view that every channel should have a remit to make challenging controversial programming as some part of its offering.

In Belfast, there was a great deal of negative feeling expressed around current affairs as a whole. These were felt to be depressing programmes which did not materially add to democratic advances.

“We’ve had enough of programmes which are politicians shouting at each other” (Belfast)

Children's programmes

The response to children's programmes illustrated clearly the various conflicting frames of reference participants used when thinking about television. For some, television was a slightly guilty indulgence, and could be a bad influence; therefore children's programmes were not seen as a social benefit.

"The electric babysitter" (Edinburgh)

"Children's programmes can just encourage children to go hyper and scream" (Cardiff)

Although few participants went so far as to suggest that there should be no children's programming in PSB, a minority suggested that much of the current provision could be cut back. These participants asserted that the market would provide entertaining children's programming through digital channels, videos and DVDs, and that so long as there was something on the terrestrial channels provided by society, individuals could bear the cost of extra programming themselves.

A different minority argued that children needed to have a choice of channels to watch. These participants tended to discuss children as a consumer group like any other, who would benefit from choice of entertainment, and focused less on the educative role of television.

However, most people took a more pragmatic middle view, arguing that children need some of their own programming, for both entertainment and education -

"They've got to have something when they come home from school" (Birmingham)

- but that society did not need to provide a great range of choice for them. This pragmatic majority tended to retain provision with the BBC, but cut some children's programming from ITV.

Most considered BBC1 provision to be the most socially valuable. This may have been a function of the programmes which were discussed (*Newsround* versus *BooBabs*). However, participants associated the BBC very strongly with educative broadcasting for children, and because of this, they believed it would provide the best quality PSB in this area.

"I would trust the BBC's integrity" (Edinburgh)

Repeating CBeebies was seen as a viable way of saving money, because very young children actively enjoy repeats. However, it was also felt to be

important to preserve original, complex, older provision for older children, and to pay to make sure that repeats are not too frequent, just as it was important to minimise repeats in adults' programming.

The question of advertising-free children's programming was discussed, but did not provoke high feeling or passionate debate. In an ideal world, participants thought, it would be nice to keep children free of advertising, but when it came to deciding where to spend public money, most were not prepared to pay more for this to happen.

It was felt to be more important to maintain some of the BBC's obligations for everyone, and keep costs down, than spend that money on subsidising children's ITV. There were some suggestions for compromise, such as only running advertising aimed at parents in that slot, or banning advertising for toys across the board. Participants thought that these might be less costly options.

Those with children, and women, were more likely to want to retain the choice across channels, to give mothers more options. Those in the middle of the social range were keen to downplay the importance of television in their children's lives, and especially to downplay the role of the commercial channels.

"My grandson liked a programme and I hotfooted it to the shop and bought the book" (Edinburgh)

Religious programming

Participants noted a difference between religious observance programming, which gained mixed reactions, and programmes about religion and culture, which, together with other historical or social shows, were felt to have some of the social benefits of documentary. They perceived these as different genres and responded differently to each.

Seen as documentaries, programmes exploring religions and faiths were considered essential, especially for a more multi-ethnic, multi-cultural future community. Overall, participants were prepared to pay for these, in the context of paying for all sorts of documentaries and dramas with social, cultural or historical interest. Those who wanted some element of provision for as many TV-consuming groups as possible, in the name of variety, approved of religious documentaries. Those who thought that socially beneficial elements ought to be inserted into entertaining, mainstream shows, also supported the idea that society could pay for interesting documentaries and dramas with a religious theme.

When it came to the discussion of worship programmes, most participants

approached the debate from a secular point of view. Those who personally practised their faiths tended to express their views guardedly during this debate. The worship genre was never discarded lightly, as all realised that although only a minority might watch it, that minority would be likely to feel strongly about it. However the eventual decision in all workshops was to discard this genre. Participants argued that in the context of other PSB elements, providing religious observance programming was less important to society.

The decision to discard the worship genre also reflected some unease that only Christian programming was shown. Participants felt that special provision needed to be made for different minority, ethnic and cultural groups, precisely because they were not in the majority. Christians, however, did not feel like a 'real' minority (whatever the participant's own ethnic or religious background) and therefore there seemed less need to protect them and provide for them.

"Take off My Favourite Hymns, it's not multicultural and it's minority. Put on a documentary about modern Buddhism or something" (London)

Because the choice to worship is so personal, many questioned whether it was up to the public as a whole to pay for this. There was no discussion of the Church of England, or an idea that PSB should encompass a national religion. Participants often suggested that individuals should go to church instead, or pay to watch specific religious channels.

In Belfast the discussion was more polarised and the subject aroused more debate than elsewhere. Many, especially the youngest in the group, felt there should be no religion at all on national television, while a small minority felt equally passionately that there should.

In Cardiff, participants tended to retain worship programming like *My Favourite Hymns* because of a tradition of religious singing. Also, the participants here were older and remembered a childhood when religion was more central to life. They were disinclined to cut worship programming altogether.

In Plymouth, participants were on average less positive about the promotion of multi-faith drama or documentaries. The older and more conservative group in this location were concerned that there was an attrition of the Christian cultural background in Britain. They were keen to ensure that programming reflected their own background before embarking on positive discrimination in favour of other faith groups. This view was shared by a minority in London also, although in the London group there were also some of the strongest advocates for programming which educated different religious groups about one another.

Participants in Edinburgh also supported the idea of religious documentaries;

they were very keen in general to learn about the world and the different social groups within it.

Multicultural programming

There was a positive response to the idea of multicultural programming. Most participants were in favour of simply ensuring that mainstream programming reflected the ethnic and cultural mix of the country.

“It’s happening already, in EastEnders you’ve got all your different sorts of families” (Plymouth)

The main body of participants asserted that if the interests and concerns of different groups were reflected in mainstream programming, more programming like *The Kumars at Number 42* would naturally emerge. This was seen as a show which, although it had emerged from a particular cultural background, was viewed as a good British comedy, rather than as a specifically Asian show.

Programmes by different ethnic groups, showing life from their point of view, were also mentioned and favoured.

Participants argued that it would benefit society to pay if British television bought in the best examples of different genres from around the world. *Bollywood Star* on Channel 4 was a good example which participants mentioned. Participants suggested that it might enhance the brands of five or Channel 4 to buy these shows, which would benefit society by encouraging these terrestrial channels to develop a range of expertise and specialisms.

In Edinburgh and Cardiff participants argued for the positive social benefit of PSB for everyone in society. It was in these locations that there was the most support for a PSB remit which included multicultural programming. Some in Birmingham also supported this idea, giving examples from their own experience of the practical benefits of knowing more about comparative religion in everyday life.

“It would be good to have those programmes so that you could learn – for instance if you were giving a job interview and the guy was a Sikh you would know that it isn’t the same as Hindu and you would know what to say and what to assume” (Birmingham)

US vs British programming

Participants felt that terrestrial television should buy the best from around the world, across genres. This included American television. Some commented that buying the best, most risky, but most successful American shows like *The Sopranos* or *Sex And The City* would be a good way to ensure that UK television was innovative but takes on less of that risk itself. Channel 4 was associated with good American programming, and participants felt it should continue to show it.

Participants did not see American programming as a threat to national broadcasting quality. Overall, they assumed that, if costs were to be cut and obligations reduced, it was more likely to result in cheaper British programmes than more American shows.

Arts programming

The majority across the workshops did not value this genre as an integral part of PSB.

The show which prompted debate was *Tim Marlow at the Lady Lever Gallery*. This programme was on five, and was replaced in the schedule exercises by an 'extreme reality' show that participants felt fitted more naturally with the five brand.

"Who's going to be watching art on channel five? It doesn't fit!" (Belfast)

The debate over this programme crystallised some deeper issues to do with television's role in the visual arts. In most groups there was an objection to subsidising art on television; a prerequisite for enjoying art was for the individual to go to a gallery (even though they acknowledged that showing art on television could be more than a substitute for a gallery visit).

"You're trying to make people be couch potatoes here, this is basically what you're doing. You're telling people to sit on their couch and watch a programme about an art gallery, what, instead of going out to an art gallery ... (Belfast)

Thinking of "the arts" forced participants to consider the crux of the question: 'is television for majority entertainment or is it an educative tool?' For most, the arts were not something which naturally 'belong' to the whole of society, unlike sport and to some extent, music. They were seen as a pastime of the affluent, rather than owned by the people. Thus arts programmes were seen more as educational, rather than a pleasure for all.

Participants suggested that people could pay to watch a dedicated opera

channel, or literature discussion channel, rather than having these programmes on terrestrial television. There was also a feeling that arts provision was in any case already present on the radio.

The group of people who argued for PSB generally as a stimulant for everyone to become more interested in the world around them were most positive towards the idea of arts programming. It was this group who pointed out that a viewer's attention could be gripped by an unusual documentary telling them something about art, which would open their minds. Arts, then, when seen as documentaries, felt more valuable to the majority of participants.

There was great interest in the idea of more music on terrestrial television. Live performance, whether it be the Proms or *Later With Jools Holland*, was appreciated across the board. Participants argued that terrestrial television could give people unique access to concerts that they otherwise could not get to. Music was mentioned several times as one of the examples of obligations participants would like to add to the current list. However there was no call for music to be shown in prime time as it was felt to be just as beneficial if shown late at night and recorded.

Sport

Across the board the vast majority felt that sport had a natural place on terrestrial TV and should be subsidised by society. It was seen as true broadcasting 'for the nation' because it reflected a majority interest which was also a shared cultural heritage. Showing global, European or national events was felt to reflect well on the UK as a society, encouraging healthy pride in British achievements.

Participants felt that PSB should provide for international events such as the Olympics, and for British national games like cricket, football and tennis.

Currently the BBC's role in this was seen to be the best.

"I think where the BBC does stand out from the other channels is regarding sport. Their coverage of sport is far greater than other channels" (Cardiff)

Participants who were interested in sport understood that the advertising interests are so great that it would be hard to have ad-free sport. All said that coverage on the other terrestrial channels, and Sky Sports, could be annoying because of the constant ad breaks, sponsorship and other commercial interludes. Therefore there was a feeling among some that the BBC should preserve some sports coverage. However, because ITV was also seen as the mainstream entertainment channel for the country, the majority would be equally happy for sport obligations to be placed on this channel, and would be

prepared to pay for obligations on both the BBC and ITV.

There was very little discussion about the role of sport in actively prompting participation, giving young people role models or increasing interest in health and fitness. As with arts coverage, participants talked more from the point of view of making provision for those who already liked sport, rather than opening the minds of the country as a whole with PSB. This reflected the sense in which sport was seen as 'entertainment'.

Despite the need for key sporting fixtures to be covered by PSB, many thought that some sports provision could safely be left to other providers. Young participants questioned the need for terrestrial provision in a world where communications technology could bring very extensive sports coverage.

"The 3G network, you can log on, download the news clips, and sports, but it's getting to the stage now where it's getting quicker and quicker, and somebody's scored a goal, you could have that within five minutes to your handset" (Belfast)

Those who had digital television felt that the role of channels like Sky Sports was so central, they could not see how the terrestrial channels could retain sports coverage. Others mentioned the role of digital channels in promoting extreme sports or youth sports. It was felt that these were not mainstream enough to be provided by PSB.

For many who were not interested in sport, the provision they required was minimal (Cup Finals and Wimbledon). All were familiar with the pay per view ethos for sport and movies, and many thought that to follow the whole of a large-scale sporting contest would be a personal decision, and the individual could contribute to a pay per view channel.

Documentaries

Documentaries were seen to cover a wide variety of interests, provide for different groups, and give society as a whole a record of history and culture which participants felt should be preserved. They were also felt to contribute to an individual's ongoing education in an entertaining and surprising way. Nobody, in any workshop, ever argued against documentaries as a genre, and all agreed that they were of great value to society.

Some younger participants, who felt they would not themselves watch serious documentaries, questioned the amount of money society should contribute to documentaries, especially in the context of dedicated digital channels, where individuals could pay to watch documentaries all day. Others mentioned that documentaries could be hard work for the viewer, which sometimes made them less valuable to an individual.

"I think it all depends how you want to go to bed, refreshed and entertained, or if you want to go to bed with stuff going round your head, like what's going on in the world" (Birmingham)

However, participants overall thought that even if non-PSB channels would provide documentaries, there remained an important role for PSB documentaries; to focus tightly upon society and instil public pride in the television providers. Most felt that these benefits were valuable enough to pay for.

There was widespread support for serious documentaries to have a place somewhere on the terrestrial network. BBC2 and Channel 4 were felt to be the best at this, with BBC1 having a role in big-budget nature and science programming.

In Edinburgh, London and Plymouth participants were most positive towards 'serious' documentaries. They pointed out that this category could also achieve some of the objectives of current affairs (as with *Dispatches*) and even religious provision (as with *Children of Abraham*).

"If you put on a documentary you can deal with religion there" (Edinburgh)

For most across all workshops, it was important to preserve these serious, historical/religious documentaries, but there was an acknowledgement that the group who would watch them might be a small minority.

"Children of Abraham is very limited, it would appeal to a certain type of person. It doesn't have that great an appeal to the general public. I'm all for documentaries, the likes of the Blue Planet has a wider appeal. It's cutting edge technology, so I would pay for things like that." (Edinburgh)

Nature documentaries, on the other hand, were felt to appeal to a larger section of the population, so participants argued that this kind of PSB benefited the majority. *Wildlife on Two* or *Blue Planet* were seen to give the public return on their investment, by producing expensive programming that is 'admired all over the world'.

"Weeks and weeks trying to get those whales to do things – it's fantastic." (Plymouth)

The BBC's perceived expertise in this area meant that most suggested that it should have the obligations for nature documentaries. Participants argued that these programmes could be shown on prime time BBC2, thereby appealing to a large niche market but also leaving BBC1 free for prime time programmes which were more overtly entertainment-focused.

There was also interest in social/historical documentaries. These kinds of programmes seemed to have a clear social role, with television playing a part in social history.

“We need to see it, because if it wasn’t for them boys getting off the boat and getting their heads blew off, we’d all be speaking German” (Belfast)

There was some support for much more entertaining extreme documentaries like *Killer Tornadoes*. Participants, however, agreed that the real role for such programmes was entertainment, and that these would not be likely to need PSB intervention to ensure their appearance on screen. Similar attitudes were expressed with regard to *Restoration* and *Make Me Honest*, which were felt to fall between documentary and reality show. There was less sense that these documentaries needed to be protected as they felt more populist.

However, some ‘reality documentaries’ were seen to be challenging and socially vital, in particular Channel 4’s *Wife Swap*. Most argued that it would benefit society to ensure that Channel 4 continues to make controversial and challenging entertainment programmes like this.

Drama

Like documentary, drama was a genre which was seen to cover a number of programming types. Participants thought of all drama as central to PSB, with a remit to bring the nation together and educate while it entertains.

“A few years ago I’d watch, if there was a drama on I’d make a point, I’d be there ready, the kids would be bathed and in bed. I’d be there all ready.” (Birmingham)

As with ‘documentary’, the word ‘drama’ seemed to stand for all that was good about British television and, when a drama was well liked, it was felt to reflect well on the nation.

“Missed Shameless? You’ve missed a brilliant English programme” (Birmingham)

Modern serious dramas like detective stories, adaptations of books and serials were also felt to be very important to society, although it was felt they might be provided by the market if not provided for by PSB. Despite this, participants wanted to ensure that somewhere in the schedule PSB provision would be made for this kind of original content.

“If you’re losing the likes of Spooks and so on you’re losing original, new material so therefore you want to avoid being stuck with repeats” (Edinburgh)

‘Light’ drama and comedy mainstream family entertainment was also valued

highly.

*“Something that you could sit down and be entertained without having to think too hard”
(Edinburgh)*

However there was not seen to be a need to promote or protect this with PSB obligations, as most thought that the market could provide this programming. The assumption was that this kind of programming brings value to the channel brands, and could win high ratings too.

Overall, participants chose to preserve serious, heavyweight, quality, literary drama produced by the BBC. Period drama in particular was seen as valuable as it was intelligent, expensive and high quality, and would need to be ringfenced because it was felt to be something that the commercial entertainment marketplace would not necessarily provide.

Participants in all locations argued that the BBC should be given the funding to make flagship dramas, the kind which would attract talent from Britain and America to be involved with the productions. The majority would be prepared to pay for this. Even for those who preferred overall to keep costs down, this element of PSB was felt to be so important that it merited some extra funding if necessary. One participant in Birmingham gave the example that the BBC in future might not be able to make *Pride and Prejudice* and virtually all agreed that it was worth a small amount of extra funding to ensure this.

There was also a call to preserve cutting edge, modern, often quirky or niche drama as represented by *Shameless*. *Shameless* polarised response more than anything else discussed in the workshops. Those who had seen it truly loved or hated it, and it tended to take over the discussion. As a result, most agreed that it was important to keep drama which challenged people and also drama that was directed towards different social groups.

*“Shameless on Channel 4 is expensive to make, but obviously young people like watching it”
(Plymouth)*

However, participants found it very hard to appreciate fully that channels might need to be supported in taking risks on innovating. Many pointed out that it was not possible to calculate the social value of risk. If an innovative new drama was not made, they argued, then nobody would really lose anything material. Therefore most were unable to say whether they thought the risk was worth the money, or not. The idea of fostering a climate for innovation through public funding was only really understood by a minority. However, that minority were extremely vocal, and managed to convince some others. The eventual decision overall was that cutting edge drama would be ‘nice to have’ rather than ‘essential’.

Most agreed that Channel 4 would be the best channel to take on this role should the funds be available. Participants mentioned that the channel was known for successful innovation. Those who supported the idea of risk-taking drama were prepared to pay for Channel 4 to have this remit.

*“Some of the films that they showed originally were things you wouldn’t see on any other channel”
(Edinburgh)*

Maintaining obligations on Channel 4 to produce risky drama was also seen as potentially beneficial. Participants tended to need reassurance that there would be genuine social benefit, as many found it hard to understand the value to society in supporting risk-taking. However, when this was explained, risky drama was felt to be a very valuable element of PSB. Even when the social value was not understood by participants, the lively debate during the workshops over risky drama illustrated the potential of this genre to create debate and discussion.

Soap operas

Soaps were generally acknowledged to be at the centre of television output. Some people described how they structured their viewing, indeed their whole week, around the soaps. While younger respondents, especially students and young mothers, were very positive about soaps, other older respondents felt that they had “got into the habit” of watching the soaps against their better judgement. These respondents, who were often retired, talked about soaps in negative language.

British soaps seemed to have a stronger place in the social fabric than Australian or American soaps. Famous British soaps in general promoted warm, humorous discussion, as every participant felt close to them, whether they liked or disliked them.

“Coronation Street is the world’s longest soap opera.

And the world’s boringest!

No, that says something, I’m sure. Programmes come and programmes go, but Coronation Street stays, and its ratings are always at number one or number two in the ratings chart, every week since the day it started 45 years ago.” (Cardiff)

Everyone agreed that soaps would remain important and that they would be shown on terrestrial television. They felt that they were popular across a broad span of the population, and also made money and enhanced channel brands,

particularly for BBC1 and ITV.

However participants did not intensely debate their PSB role, as they were perceived to sit firmly in the 'entertainment' camp. This meant that most agreed there was little need to support them financially. In fact, it was thought to be good for the channels to have to work hard and compete with each other to make the most popular programming of this type.

When it came to less well-known soaps, soaps other than *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders*, such as *The Bill* or *Doctors*, opinion was unclear as to whether these soaps would continue if they were not subsidised. For many, this did not appear to be a problem; if the programmes were not popular, it was not seen to be a social problem if they were taken off the air.

There was little discussion of soaps' role in showcasing sensitive social issues. An acknowledged aspect of the role of soaps was their airing of social problems, but this tended to be seen as a device to dramatise such issues rather than encourage serious discussion.

There was very little discussion of the 'support systems' around soaps, such as website links or freephone numbers. Participants tended not to link these offers of help with PSB obligations, and there was little sense that this social remit might alter if PSB obligations changed.

Reality programmes

Responses to reality shows on the schedules illustrated clearly the ambiguous position of the genre at present. The genre encompasses a diverse range of shows from the makeover format to the observational fly on the wall, and to include various game show formats where real people are set tasks. When discussing reality as a genre participants rolled their eyes, laughed, and talked as though these programmes were something they had to put up with rather than something they enjoyed or benefited from.

"Nobody likes it, they just watch it!" (Belfast)

However when discussing individual shows, it was universally acknowledged that reality was everyone's 'guilty secret'. Therefore there was a realisation within all groups that it would be impossible to remove reality shows from the schedules, as they are usually inexpensive ratings-winners.

In addition, programmes such as *Wife Swap* and *Make Me Honest* seemed to fulfil a more educative function and were considered close to both documentary and drama. Some commented that *Big Brother* had felt like a real innovation at first, holding an interesting mirror up to society.

There was some feeling that the reality show format had ceased to be socially

beneficial or interesting simply because the format was getting old.

“that ghastly fly-on-the-wall rubbish...when they’re onto a good thing they flog it to death” (Cardiff)

Programmes which involve calling-in and voting were widely seen as exploitative and money-spinning exercises put out by the channels. Some of the negative comments on voting derived from a feeling that a vote was often spurious. Voting was often perceived to be between near-identical candidates (as on some of the music performance vote shows) or to achieve something that the viewer is not really interested in, or had already seen (such as voting for the best comedy show or film). Votes in this context were seen as a shorthand for a cheap collection of clips from other shows.

“they do all these reality shows and then they do another reality show where they put all the other ones together” (Cardiff)

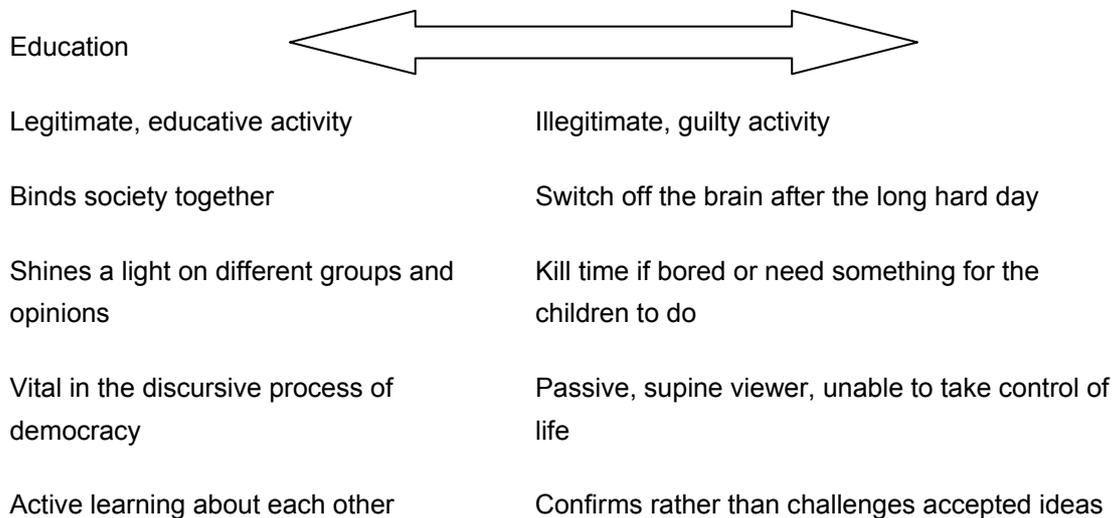
Comedy

Participants believed that comedy had a role to play in PSB, being both entertaining and socially cohesive, plus reflecting national interests as it was famously something that the British do well. However, although comedies were always considered to be part of a well-rounded schedule, it was largely felt that the market would provide innovative comedy.

From some, there was a suggestion that BBC2 or Channel 4 might be given a remit to develop niche comedy, although this was not followed up by the majority. Again, as with many of the other genres, the BBC was felt to lead in family comedy, and most agreed that family comedy on this channel was valuable to society.

Endnote: perceptions of television and quality

Participants held two common, yet contradictory, conceptions of the role of television in society. These were implicitly and explicitly referred to throughout the workshops.



Participants moved between these two points of view during the day. They moved gradually along the spectrum but also, often, shifted between extremes in a very short space of time. Sometimes, they held views from both ends of the spectrum simultaneously.

Participants tended to agree that both ends of this spectrum might be necessary to ensure 'quality television'. They were concerned, though, that people's likely decision process when choosing television, both as individuals and as a society, meant that the kind of television which is 'good for society' in the long term will be hard to achieve. They alluded to the difficulty in planning for PSB given that, as individuals, people do not tend to appreciate programmes that may be good for society as a whole. Hence from the very start of the day, participants tended to assume that some form of intervention would continue to be necessary in future broadcasting, to make sure that programmes which fall on the left hand side of the spectrum get made.

"My wife would SAY she wants educating programmes, but if the house was on fire she wouldn't move from EastEnders" (Cardiff)

Participants used the word 'quality' again and again to try to pin down programming which could both entertain and educate. They defined it in various ways:

- High production values
- Famous actors and directors

- Originality within a genre, or by creating a new genre
- Evidence of money spent, for example exotic locations or special effects
- Serious content: due to subject matter (classic novel adaptation, serious historical documentary); or because it evidences the effort and work that has gone into it (new drama or comedy); or because it deals with a clearly socially important subject (sporting fixtures, high profile music events)
- Often prime time (though not exclusively)
- A clear fit with channel branding; for example *Channel 4 News* and its particular style of news coverage, or five's documentaries.

Participants perceived that low-quality television could also be easily identified, having the following characteristics:-

- Cheap or unattractive setting or graphics
- Boring, repetitive or humdrum scripts
- Clearly biased or inaccurate in its facts
- Seeking to make money from the viewer (as in telephone voting) without providing anything genuinely new for the viewer once the vote has ended (e.g. voting for a favourite comedy that has already been shown)
- Recycling a well-worn format
- Cutting corners by showing old footage rather than new clips
- Scheduled at 'dead' times when prime audiences are likely to be absent (although low quality programmes are also thought to be shown in prime time)

Participants tended to assume that every programme of high quality in some way had a social value. High quality programmes were described in terms of 'lingering' educational value. These were the types of programme that viewers could reflect on afterwards; programmes from which it would be possible to learn new facts or points of view, and programmes which could be discussed with others, contributing to social cohesion.

Appendix A: Methodology

In designing the most appropriate research method to meet these objectives, a number of issues and challenges needed to be resolved. The research required that detailed views be gathered in relation to a complex and technical subject. Ofcom's phase 1 audience research underlined that many people were unaware exactly what 'public service broadcasting' is. It also showed that viewers appeared to be unwilling to countenance cutting back the idea of socially valuable programming, even though elements of public service broadcasting may not be highly valued *per se*.

Ofcom required a methodology to further interrogate these reactions, and to find out what people felt about PSB programming and channels once the costs to society were attached to provision. It therefore commissioned MORI to carry out a series of day-long deliberative qualitative workshops.

Day-long workshops were chosen as the methodology for this research because:

- A whole day allowed greater time and opportunity to reflect on the issues being discussed and ensure that all views were aired;
- The extended discussion allowed both the moderators and Ofcom to make short presentations of policy issues throughout the day for comment and reaction, without overwhelming participants with too much data at any one time;
- The design allowed more time to break the group down into smaller subgroups and then reconvene; these changes of pace encouraged greater involvement from participants;
- Workshops allowed greater time for participation exercises, where the participants were actively engaged in different exercises, rather than simply responding to questions;
- The fact that there were no *more* than 25 people at any one workshop ensured that the plenary sessions as well as the break-out groups could also be true shared discussions.

As well as sessions in plenary, the workshops broke into three mini-groups at various points during the day to allow a more in-depth exploration of the issues, as well as sessions in plenary. Breaking into smaller groups allowed for different groupings of participants, for example by attitudes towards the licence fee, age, and television platform.

Participants were 'drip-fed' information throughout the day, so that they were able to move beyond their current situation and preferences and strategically

plan a socially and financially viable public service broadcasting solution, once they had digested the new information presented to them.

This also allowed mapping of changing views over time with the impact of new information. The workshops used as stimulus examples of costing trade-offs, programming genres and funding options.

The design also ensured that participants were thinking from the perspective of society as whole, rather than from their own individual points of view. It allowed for discussion of personal preference and also debate over what would be best for society and all the different people within it.

Sample

Six workshops were carried out with around 20-25 people attending each. Workshops were carried out in London, Plymouth, Cardiff, Belfast, Edinburgh and Birmingham during May and June 2004.

The workshops were structured to include a wide range of views:

Workshop	Location	Platform	Socio-economic group	Age	Life stage
1	London	11 Terrestrial only, 7 people Sky/Cable, 4 people on Freeview	ABC1	11 aged 16-24, 11 aged 25-45	Mix of single, pre-family couples, parents
2	Birmingham	8 Terrestrial only, 13 people Sky/Cable, 4 people on Freeview	DE	10 aged 16-24, 15 aged 25-45	Mix of single, pre-family couples, parents
3	Plymouth	9 Terrestrial only, 10 people Sky/Cable, 3 people on Freeview	C1C2	10 aged 45-55, 12 aged 55+	Mix of older children at home, empty nesters, retired
4	Edinburgh	5 Terrestrial only, 11 people Sky/Cable, 4 people on Freeview	ABC1	10 aged 45-55, 10 aged 55+	Mix of older children at home, empty nesters, retired
5	Cardiff	9 Terrestrial, 10 people Sky/Cable, 4 people on Freeview	DE	12 aged 45-55, 11 aged 55+	Mix of older children at home, empty nesters, retired
6	Belfast	Six terrestrial only, 12 people Sky/Cable/NTL, 4 people on Freeview	C1C2	12 aged 16-24, 10 aged 25-45	Mix of single, pre-family couples, parents

Also included within each workshop were the following

- A range of amount of television watched (light/medium/heavy);
- A range of ages within each age band;
- A range of length of time owning a multi-channel platform;
- A range of different genres watched on television;
- Various attitudes to television;
- A range of different job roles. Three workshops were held on a Saturday to ensure that those working in the week were able to attend.

Attitudes to the licence fee were also collected (assessing how far people supported the licence fee) though no specific quota was placed on this. This data was used to divide participants into syndicate groups during some of the workshops.

Workshop sessions

Each workshop included the following activities:

INTRODUCTION AND WARM-UP: Participants were asked to create a television programme from a number of images they were given

FUTURE SCENARIO PLANNING: Participants were asked to think about how the world will look in 2015 and the context of television within this

STAND-ALONE SCHEDULES: Participants were given a series of five illustrative TV schedules (A, B, C, D and E) and asked which was their personal preference and which they thought best for society as a whole

EXPLANATION OF SCHEDULES: Participants were told what each schedule represented in terms of funding for the BBC and obligations on ITV, Channel 4 and five, and asked which, given this information, they thought best for society as a whole

PROPORTIONATE COSTS OF SCHEDULES: Participants were told the proportionate cost to society of these schedules, relative to today's funding. Participants were asked for the one thought best for society as a whole

PROGRAMME VALUATION: Participants took on the role of 'the regulator' and decided which programmes to remove from the schedule if budgets were reduced. Schedule B, representing the status quo, was used

ACTUAL COST: Participants were told the actual possible sums of money and asked for their reaction

OPTIONS FOR FUNDING: Participants were given the options for funding the different schedules including licence fee, taxation and subscription options, and asked for their reactions.

These exercises are discussed in more detail below:

Future Scenario Planning

Participants were asked to generate future scenarios of how society would be in 2015 in terms of work, hobbies, citizenship, finances, political climate, transport, home environment, and children. In particular, participants were asked to focus on sources of information, entertainment and communication. They were also asked to consider what effect these changes would have on television, especially if society became more global, multicultural or had an increasingly proportion of older people.

The rationale for scenario planning was to explore the kinds of social changes that might be relevant for the future of PSB. Because participants were imaginatively involved in constructing these scenarios, they were then able to assess different options, content and costs for different PSB packages in the light of different possible futures.

The scenarios also functioned as a 'reality check', presented during the workshop, so that when people had chosen different PSB options, they would be able to reflect on how well those options were likely to serve the society of the future. This was designed to ensure that people were not simply choosing options in reaction to today's status quo. It was devised as another way to help participants move from analysis of their personal preferences and think about 'society as a whole'.

Stand-alone schedules

In this exercise, in consultation with Ofcom and the broadcasters, five programme schedules were created, representing different scenarios of programme obligations and levels of funding for the main terrestrial channels: A, B, C, D and E¹⁰ (of course, the schedules were not labelled in this way for participants as otherwise the hierarchy of the schedules would have been obvious). These indicated an illustrative afternoon and evening's programmes.

Participants were asked to look through the schedules and spot the key differences and give their personal preferences between the schedules. In particular, participants were prompted on differences in programme type, genre, channel, time of day, and programme origin. As well as examining schedules on a personal basis, participants were also asked to think which was the best schedule for society in general and what, if any, were vital

¹⁰ In London, two further schedules were included: R and I. It emerged during the day that the changes were too subtle to be useful as stimulus on these schedules, so they were dropped for subsequent groups.

elements of each schedule.

The objective of this exercise was for participants to look at elements of the schedule without any costs attached and to explore trade-offs between types of programme in the schedule, different channel approaches, and the schedules as a whole, thinking about their importance for society.

To avoid the methodological danger of participants focusing on the specific programme listed in the schedule rather than the wider genre it represented, moderators frequently used different examples of programme types in discussion.

Explanation of schedules

Once participants had chosen the schedule that they thought represented what would be best for society as a whole, they were then told what each schedule represented, as below, and asked for their views.

Scenario	Funding of BBC	Obligations on ITV1, Channel 4 and five
A	More than today	More than today
B	As today	As today
C	As today	None
D	Less than today	As today
E	Less than today	None

Proportionate cost of schedules

In this workshop exercise, participants were informed of the proportionate costs of the schedules. Moderators took care to remind them that these costs were adjusted for inflation and represented money in today's prices

Scenario	Funding of BBC	Obligations on ITV1, Channel 4 and five	Public funding cost relative to today
A	More than today	More than today	+ 50%
B	As today	As today	+25%
C	As today	None	0
D	Less than today	As today	0
E	Less than today	None	-25%

Once participants were presented with this information, they were asked for their reactions and whether their chosen schedule had changed once they knew the costs. In particular, participants had to consider whether it was more important to keep costs down and or keep TV the same.

Programme valuation

Participants were provided with schedule B and required to do a trade-off exercise on budget, imagining they were the regulator trying to combine citizen and consumer imperatives. This trade-off exercise was selected to 'force' participants into making difficult decisions about what is best for society.

All the programmes on schedule B had a counter rating ranging from one to five representing the cost of the programme to make. On ITV, Channel 4 and five this cost was relative to the amount of advertising revenue that programme received.

Participants were asked to remove counters from schedule B, and explain which genres and styles of programmes were taken off and what society would lose from not having these programmes. At the end of the exercise, participants were asked to add a further ten counters to see what kind of programmes they would add in.

Actual costs

Towards the end of the workshops, participants were presented with the real figures involved.

Participants were told that the current figure for the licence fee, £121 a household, gives BBC about £2billion to spend on television. Participants were also informed that the cost of the programme obligations set by Ofcom on ITV, Channel 4 and five is estimated to be £500m a year.

Their views on the acceptability of paying sums of between £91 and £181, depending on the schedule they had chosen, were canvassed.

Funding Options

Three different funding options for each schedule were presented: a licence fee, taxation and subscription model. Participants were asked for their opinions on what was the best method of funding this schedule.

Diaries

Prior to attending the workshop, each participant was asked to fill in a diary. Each participant was asked to choose two days in the week to detail what they had been watching. The diary also asked about general attitudes towards television including the best and worst things on television, and what society gains from having television.

The diary helped encourage participants to reflect on the key issues before they came to the workshop, which meant they got quickly into the debate. The diary was used at various points of the day to compare what participants actually watched with what they felt was best for society.

Programmes chosen for stimulus

The schedules were designed to represent a full range of genres. Some examples of the programmes used include:

- Social involvement (e.g. *Restoration II*)
- Lifestyle entertainment (e.g. *Diarmuid's Big Adventure*, *Changing Rooms*)
- Original comedy (e.g. *My Family*)
- Children's programmes (e.g. *Boo-Bahs*)
- Lifestyle magazine programmes (e.g. *Richard and Judy*)
- Regional programmes. These were adapted in the schedules for each area (e.g. *For the Love of the Game*, *Larsson the Legend* and *Landscape Mysteries*)
- Very local news. These were indicative programmes designed to elicit reactions to very local news programmes (e.g. *Plymouth News*)
- Regional News. As with regional programmes these were adapted to each area (e.g. *Reporting Scotland*)
- Serious documentaries (e.g. *Dispatches*)
- xtreme documentaries (e.g. *Killer Tornadoes*)
- Lifestyle documentaries (e.g. *Wife Swap*)
- Religious (e.g. *My Favourite Hymns*)
- Lifestyle/consumer (e.g. *Antiques Auction*)
- Arts programming (e.g. *Tim Marlow on the Lady Lever Gallery*)
- Cutting edge drama (e.g. *Shameless*)
- High quality US import (e.g. *ER*)
- Mainstream current affairs (e.g. *Tonight*)
- Soap (e.g. *The Bill*, *EastEnders*)
- Sport was represented by Horse Racing on Channel 4 in the afternoon. It was decided to leave further specific programmes out of the indicative schedules because its (lengthy) presence in prime-time would skew the output of a single channel. However, moderators – and participants – raised the genre independently.