BBC Performance Tracker 2020-2021 Technical Report

Preface

This document details the methodology, sampling and weighting for the 2020-2021 BBC Performance Tracker study, which has been run by Critical Research on behalf of Ofcom.

As regulator of the BBC, one of Ofcom's central responsibilities is to hold the BBC to account for its performance in fulfilling its mission and delivering its four public purposes that fall within Ofcom's regulatory role, namely:

- Public purpose 1: To provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them
- Public purpose 2: To support learning for people of all ages
- Public purpose 3: To show the most creative, highest quality and distinctive output and services
- Public purpose 4: To reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all the UK's nations and regions

For this assessment to be meaningful, we need it to be based on a clear understanding of a range of factors, including audiences' own views on the BBC's performance.

Since 2017, Ofcom has conducted an annual quantitative tracker to measure audiences' views on how important each of the four purposes are and how well the BBC delivers them. The tracker aims to assess the BBC's performance to serve audiences in all of the UK's nations, evaluating overall satisfaction and the perceived distinctiveness and quality of the BBC's output versus that of its competitors, as well as how these change over time.

The tracker also measures self-reported usage of BBC and competitor channels across radio, television, online and the take-up of on-demand services.

Prior to starting fieldwork, to ensure the survey remains fit for purpose and reflects changes in the broadcasting sector, the existing questionnaire was reviewed by the project teams within Ofcom and Critical Research and a consultation was placed on the Ofcom website notifying stakeholders of the changes.

Methodology

In the previous three years of fieldwork from 2017 to March 2020, the BBC Performance Tracker had been conducted using a mixed method approach with a 50:50 split between online interviews conducted through online panels and face-to-face interviews conducted in-home by interviewers.

This mixed method approach using online and face-to-face interviewing had been the intended approach for the research to be conducted each month from April 2020 to March 2021 for Year 4 of

the study. However, the outbreak of Covid-19 prevented the use of a face-to-face methodology and an alternative approach was needed to be conducted alongside online panel interviewing, which remained a feasible interviewing method.

After reviewing the effectiveness of a number of trials, a decision was taken to use a postal approach inviting respondents to complete an online interview via a unique reference number or request a self-completion paper questionnaire or request a telephone interview. The paper and phone interviews were targeted at non-internet users and light users of the internet and used a shorter version of the questionnaire to maximise completion of the survey. The postal approach allowed for up to two respondents aged 16 and over per household to complete the survey through providing unique reference numbers in the invitation letter.

Critical Research interviewed an overall sample of 4,496 adults aged 16+ in the UK. Interviews were conducted through online panels (2,786) or through the postal approach (1,710). Interviewing through online panels was conducted each month from June 2020 to the end of March 2021. Invitation letters for the postal approach were mailed in July, August and October 2020 and also in January and February 2021. Reminder letters were sent two weeks later to those who did not respond to the initial invitation letter.

The data are initially weighted to correct the over-representation of nations, regions and areas to produce a geographically representative sample. They are then weighted by age, gender, social class, working status, and BBC TV region to match the known population profile. An additional level of weighting was added, covering volume of internet usage – hours per week. Additional corrective weighting has been applied to the use of BBC websites or catch-up television services.

Details of the sampling frame, research methodology, weighting procedures and reporting are outlined in the following pages. A note on statistical reliability is also included.[1]

[1] See Appendix A – Guide to Statistical Reliability

Sample design

Samples were drawn for the postal approach based upon the Royal Mail Postcode Address File (PAF) and 2011 Census data. The main sample was drawn by a simple one stage probability sample, with probabilities skewed by nation, BBC TV region and urbanity to align with the quotas required by these variables. This main sample was supplemented by two samples, skewed by drawing sample across sampling units (SUs) formed by grouping OAs (Output Areas). These samples were drawn from areas known (from the 2011 Census) to have high proportions of adults within the UK population where other studies led us to anticipate a lower response rate, specifically:

- Sample B, containing SUs with a higher incidence of adults aged 55+ plus or from socio-economic group DE, falling within the 30% highest scores on the SAD index of deprivation
- Sample D, containing SUs with a higher incidence of adults aged 16-34

Quotas

Quotas were set for each month of interviewing achieved through online panels, in terms of the respondent's age, gender, household socio-economic group and region/ nation.

For the postal approach, given the method of response, it would have been difficult if not impossible to control the final sample through quotas, and therefore no controls were applied post-sampling, relying on respondent weighting to align the sample with the UK population on the standard quota variables of nation, region, urbanity, age, SEG and gender.

It had been intended to meet specific targets for adults from minority ethnic groups and certain religions through the in-home face-to-face interviewing. This was not possible with the postal approach and so these groups were allowed to fall out naturally within the overall sample.

Weighting

All data has been weighted to the following demographic profiles:

- Gender (Male, Female)
- Age (16-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65-74 and 75+)
- Nation (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales) and BBC TV Region
- Urbanity (Urban, Rural)
- Social class (AB, C1, C2, DE)
- Working status (Working, Not working)
- Internet usage (following the profile used for Ofcom's 2021 Technology Tracker data)
- Additional corrective weighting has been applied to the use of BBC websites or catch-up television services

The following table shows the initial unweighted sample and the final weighted sample profile.

Figures based on UK adults	% Weighted Profile	% Unweighted Interviews achieved
Gender – Male 16+	49%	43%
Gender – Female 16+	51%	56%
Age – 16-24	12%	14%
Age – 25-44	34%	36%
Age – 45-64	30%	33%
Age – 65+	23%	17%
SEG – AB	30%	30%
SEG – C1	29%	29%
SEG – C2	16%	16%
SEG – DE	24%	24%
Working Status – working	62%	58%
Working Status – not working	35%	38%
Nation – England	84%	68%
Nation – Scotland	8%	12%
Nation – Wales	5%	11%
Nation – Northern Ireland	3%	9%
Urban areas[2]	87%	87%
Rural areas	13%	13%

The percentages described above as '% Weighted' are the targets used to weight the data. The figures for age, gender and location are taken from the 2011 Census, with age quotas updated to align with the ONS 2017 mid-year population estimates. SEG profiles come from NRS published data. The '% Unweighted' column shows the actual percentage of interviews achieved in the 2020-2021 fieldwork.

[2] Urban/ rural percentage excludes interviews where it was not possible to assign an urban/ rural code

Appendix A – Guide to Statistical Reliability

The variation between the sample results and the 'true' values (the findings that would have been obtained if everyone had been interviewed) can be predicted from the sample sizes on which the results are based, and on the number of times that a particular answer is given. The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually chosen to be 95%, that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the 'true' values will fall within a specified range. However, as the sample is weighted, we need to use the effective sample size[3] (ESS) rather than actual sample size to judge the accuracy of results. The following table compares ESS and actual samples for some of the main analysis groups.

	Actual	ESS
Total	4,496	3,128
Gender – Male 16+	1,933	1,392
Gender – Female 16+	2,524	1,732
Age – 16-24	642	450
Age – 25-44	1,628	1,204
Age – 45-64	1,463	1,079
Age – 65+	752	513
SEG – AB	1,342	959
SEG – C1	1,285	901
SEG – C2	736	515
SEG – DE	1,070	709
Working Status – working	2,608	1,948
Working Status – not working	1,722	1,067
Nation – England	3,059	2,390
Nation – Scotland	524	405
Nation – Wales	486	385
Nation – Northern Ireland	424	387
Urban areas	3,400	2,377
Rural areas	532	352

The table below illustrates the required ranges for different sample sizes and percentage results at the '95% confidence interval'.

Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels

Effective sample size	10% or 90% ±	20% or 80% ±	30% or 70% ±	40% or 60% ±	50% ±
3,128 (Total)	1.1%	1.4%	1.6%	1.8%	1.8%
1,392 (Gender: Male)	1.6%	2.1%	2.5%	2.6%	2.7%
901 (SEG: C1)	2.0%	2.7%	3.1%	3.3%	3.3%
352 (Urbanity: Rural)	3.2%	4.3%	4.9%	5.2%	5.3%

[3] Effective Sample Size shown as Effective Weighted Sample in the data tables produced

For example, if 30% or 70% of a sample of 3,128 give a particular answer, the chances are 95 in 100 that the 'true' value will fall within the range of ± 1.6 percentage points from the sample results.

When results are compared between separate groups within a sample, different results may be obtained. The difference may be 'real', or it may occur by chance (because not everyone has been interviewed). To test if the difference is a real one – i.e. if it is 'statistically significant' – we again must know the size of the samples, the percentages giving a certain answer and the degree of confidence chosen. If we assume '95% confidence interval', the difference between two sample results must be greater than the values given in the table below to be significant.

Differences required for significant at or near these percentages

Sample sizes being compared	10% or 90% ±	20% or 80% ±	30% or 70% ±	40% or 60% ±	50% ±
1,392 vs. 1,732 (Male vs. Female)	2.1%	2.8%	3.2%	3.5%	3.5%
959 vs. 901 (SEG AB vs. C1)	2.7%	3.6%	4.2%	4.5%	4.6%