BBC Performance Tracker 2021-2022 Technical Report

Preface

This document details the methodology, sampling and weighting for the 2021-2022 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.

An annual quantitative tracker has been conducted each year since 2017 in order to include audiences' own views on the BBC's performance. The main research objectives of the study are:

- To understand the public's perception of the BBC's delivery of the public purposes.
- To understand the public's views on the importance of the public purposes.
- To evaluate the BBC's performance in comparison to traditional and emerging competitors.
- To understand brand awareness of the BBC in the wider context of the market (e.g. where do they go and find content first).

The questionnaire used for this 2021-2022 fieldwork was broadly unchanged from the questionnaire that had been used for the 2020-2021 fieldwork. Ahead of the fieldwork conducted in that previous year, the questionnaire had been subject to an extensive review, including a review of the public purpose statements and sub-statements. The review was conducted in consultation with the broader project team within Ofcom and was achieved through a substantial phase of cognitive testing and piloting, conducted pre lockdown in 2020.

In the three years of fieldwork that had been conducted from 2017 to March 2020 (Year 1 to Year 3 of the BBC Performance Tracker), interviewing 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.

As face-to-face fieldwork was not possible in either Year 4 or Year 5, due to Covid-19, an alternative approach was needed to be conducted alongside online panel interviewing. Following a number of trials, it was decided to use a postal approach inviting respondents to complete an online interview via a unique reference number or request a self-completion paper questionnaire. The paper interviews were targeted at non-users and light users of the internet and used a shorter version of the questionnaire in order to maximise completion of the survey.

The postal approach allowed for up to two respondents aged 16 and over per household through providing unique reference numbers in the invitation letter. This was allowed as it provides better coverage of adults who are not the head of household than the in-home interviewing approach, and the overall level of clustering is lower than with the in-home interviewing approach.

For the Year 5 fieldwork, Critical Research interviewed an overall sample of 4,350 adults, aged 16+, in the UK. Interviews were conducted through online panels (2,388) or through the postal approach (1,962). Interviewing through online panels was conducted each month from April 2021 to the end of March 2022. Invitation letters for the postal approach were mailed in each of April, June, August, October and November 2021 and in February 2022. Reminder letters were sent two weeks later to those not responding 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.

Had it been possible to conduct face-to-face interviewing, 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+	48%	46%
Gender – Female 16+	52%	54%
Age – 16-24	12%	13%
Age – 25-44	34%	35%
Age – 45-64	30%	31%
Age – 65+	23%	20%
SEG – AB	30%	29%
SEG – C1	28%	27%
SEG – C2	16%	17%
SEG – DE	24%	25%
Working Status – working	62%	57%
Working Status – not working	35%	39%
Nation – England	84%	67%
Nation – Scotland	8%	13%
Nation – Wales	5%	11%
Nation – Northern Ireland	3%	9%
Urban areas[2]	88%	88%
Rural areas	12%	12%

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 2021-2022 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	4,350	3,439
Gender – Male 16+	1,983	1,574
Gender – Female 16+	2,323	1,837
Age – 16-24	576	480
Age – 25-44	1,539	1,250
Age – 45-64	1,346	1,063
Age – 65+	865	671
SEG – AB	1,259	1,011
SEG – C1	1,190	949
SEG – C2	734	594
SEG – DE	1,099	838
Working Status – working	2,485	2,042
Working Status – not working	1,713	1,289
Nation – England	2935	2,616
Nation – Scotland	556	501
Nation – Wales	459	422
Nation – Northern Ireland	400	377
Urban areas	3519	2,786
Rural areas	497	376

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% ±
3,439 (Total)	1.0%	1.4%	1.6%	1.7%	1.7%
1,574 (Gender: Male)	1.5%	2.0%	2.3%	2.5%	2.5%
949 (SEG: C1)	2.0%	2.6%	3.0%	3.2%	3.3%
376 (Urbanity: Rural)	3.1%	4.1%	4.7%	5.1%	5.2%

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

For example, if 30% or 70% of a sample of 3,439 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% ±
1,574 vs. 1,837 (Male vs. Female)	2.0%	2.7%	3.1%	3.3%	3.4%
1,011 vs. 949 (SEG AB vs. C1)	2.7%	3.5%	4.1%	4.3%	4.4%