

BCR 08a

Y Pwyllgor Cymunedau, Cydraddoldeb a Llywodraeth Leol
Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee
Ymchwiliad i'r Adolygiad o Siarter y BBC
Inquiry into the BBC Charter Review
Gwybodaeth ategol gan: Ymddiriedolaeth y BBC
Supplementary information from: BBC Trust

The Committee asked to understand the content of monitoring reports that the BBC Trust has received from the BBC Executive relating to the BBC Trust Impartiality Report: [BBC Network News and Current Affairs on Coverage of the Four UK Nations](#).

As the Committee will be aware, the commissioning of this report in 2008 was one of the earliest actions of the BBC Trust after it was established. It was in response to concerns expressed to the Trust by the BBC Audience Council Wales, amongst others, about the way in which Network News was covering policy matters devolved to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The report included an independent assessment by Professor Anthony King, content analysis by Cardiff University's School of Journalism and audience research by the market research analysts, BMRB. The report called for greater accuracy in the signposting of stories as to which parts of the UK a particular story applied to, more and better coverage of the different nations on network channels, more analysis of how the nations compared in policy areas, and a less London/Westminster centric view of stories. The BBC Executive was asked for an action plan to address the issues.

In 2010, follow up content analysis was carried out by Cardiff University which found "significant improvements". The Trust's conclusions noted:

- a significant increase in the proportion of news stories related to or about Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland on BBC television with a much smaller increase on non-BBC television outlets;
- a significant increase in BBC television reporting from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland compared with a drop by other broadcasters;
- the proportion of news items referring to devolved powers almost doubled on the BBC overall while remaining the same on other broadcasters;
- the number of explicit or implicit references made to devolve powers increased dramatically (from 71 to 480) on the BBC and more modestly on other broadcasters;

- the number of news items making a comparison between the policies of devolved nations remains low but has doubled on the BBC whilst falling on other broadcasters.

However there were still concerns about the lack of clarity in the labelling of stories and the continuing focus on stories about England.

We published that [report](#).

The Trust requested regular updates on progress from the Executive on the key points of the report. The Executive updates focus on accuracy and ‘enrichment’ that is, in particular, the various nations approaches to policy.

Following the most recent update earlier this year the Editorial Standards Committee of the Trust concluded that:

- the period under review was dominated by the referendum on Scottish independence and its aftermath so this was an unusual period;
- the importance of accuracy in reporting was front of mind in this period perhaps as a result of the referendum and there were few complaints from the nations about errors;
- the centrality of the Scottish referendum, in a year when there had been major international developments too, led to less network coverage of other nations.

Key points that the Committee concluded with regard to Wales is:

- whilst labelling has improved, there is still room for improvement especially on-line;
- there is an appetite – as expressed by audience members to Audience Council Wales – for more output comparing the different approaches to public policy across the devolved nations of the UK;
- the complexities of cross-national policies and public services can still cause difficulties of attribution and in the debate over the devolution of further powers care must continue to be taken.

The Editorial Standards Committee decided that it was important to measure output again objectively. So it has commissioned further content analysis from Cardiff University looking at current output. This is ongoing. The Trust expects to receive this report consider the findings and publish it along Trust conclusions in the first half of next year. It will investigate whether the information provided about the four

nations is even-handed and accurate. Cardiff will carry out a four week analysis of BBC and non-BBC news media and compare their findings to the 2007 and 2009 samples. Their assessment will include an examination of:

- topics covered;
- sources used;
- story prominence and length;
- the extent to which factual information about the governance of the four nations is conveyed.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elan Closs Stephens". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Elan Closs Stephens
Ymddiriedolwr Cenedlaethol y BBC Cymru
BBC National Trustee Wales