



Meeting of the BBC Board

MINUTES

21 October 2021

Held at Broadcasting House, London, W1A 1AA
And Via Video Conference

ITEMS OF BUSINESS

1. Apologies and Conflicts of Interest
2. Minutes and Matters Arising
3. Committee Reports
4. Executive Reports
5. Standards and Impartiality
6. iPlayer
7. Health and Safety Annual Review
8. Audience Research
9. AOB

ATTENDANCE

Present

- Richard Sharp Chairman
- Tim Davie Director-General
- Shirley Garrood Non-executive director
- Robbie Gibb Non-executive director
- Tanni Grey-Thompson Non-executive director
- Ian Hargreaves Non-executive director
- Charlotte Moore Chief Content Officer
- Steve Morrison Non-executive director
- Nicholas Serota Non-executive director
- Elan Closs Stephens Non-executive director
- Leigh Tavaziva Group Chief Operating Officer
- Fran Unsworth Director, News and Current Affairs

Apologies: There were no apologies

With

- Phil Harrold Company Secretary
- Jo Clarke Secretary to the Board
- Gautam Rangarajan Group Director, Strategy and Performance (4-6 & 8)
- Rhodri Talfan Davies Director, Nations (items 4 & 5)
- Clare Sumner Director, Policy (item 4)
- David Jordan Director, Editorial Policy and Standards (item 5)
- Victoria Wakely Serota Review Team (item 5)
- Gareth Tuck Serota Review Team (item 5)
- Dan McGolpin Director, iPlayer (item 6)
- Balram Veliath Director, Quality, Risk and Assurance (item 7)
- Ross Taylor Research Director, MTM (item 8)

BOARD MINUTES 21 OCTOBER 2021

1. Apologies and Conflicts of Interest

- 1.1 There were no apologies for this meeting.
- 1.2 There were no conflicts of interest declared.

2. Minutes and Matters Arising

- 2.1 The minutes from the 23 September Board meetings were approved.
- 2.2 The Board noted the Matters Arising paper and updates on the actions from the last meeting.

3. Committee Reports

(paragraph 3.5 for commercial confidentiality)

- 3.1 The Chair of the Fair Trading Committee reported on its most recent meeting. The Committee had noted a progress report on the Ofcom Review of Studios. The Committee also noted an update on fair trading training and how any non-compliance was being addressed. Overall completion rates were positive and above target. The Committee were joined by members of the teams in the public service and Studios who were managing the transfer of Children's in-house production to the commercial side for an update on progress. The Committee discussed the transfer and agreed the position that the changes had no material impact on trading and separation. A final position on materiality would be communicated to Ofcom by the end of the month. The Committee also considered the fair trading risk and assurance report, which had raised no substantial issues. The next meeting was scheduled for January and would include a meeting with Ofcom.
- 3.2 The Chair of the Wales Committee reported on its most recent meeting. It had been the first time that Rhuanedd Richards had joined the Wales Committee meeting since starting her role as Content & Services Director for BBC Wales. The Committee noted an update from her on co-commissioning for TV and Radio Content and an outline of her priorities for the role going forward. The Committee had discussed the high-level recommendations of the Serota Review with particular regard to output in the Nations. The Committee also noted progress with the News modernisation and Across the UK programmes. Lisa Tregale, BBC National Orchestra and Chorus of Wales, joined to talk

to the Committee about her work and the Orchestra's outreach programme. The meeting closed with a session with audience members.

- 3.3 The Chair of the Northern Ireland Committee reported on its most recent meeting. The Committee noted the updated Terms of Reference and discussed the delayed appointment process for a NI member of the Board. The Committee was given an update on the political news agenda including the Covid-19 infection rate in Northern Ireland. The Committee had also discussed the Northern Irish centenary programming and the upcoming Service of Reflection and Hope. Updates were provided on the technology investment and property plan for BBC Northern Ireland and the NI Screen Partnership, where the final agreement had now been signed. The Committee discussed the regular audience report, which sets audience performance in Northern Ireland in the context of performance across the UK. Coverage of the Euros and Olympics had performed much less well in Northern Ireland than in other areas of the UK, which highlighted the different preferences of Nations audiences.
- 3.4 The Chair of the England Committee reported on its most recent meeting. At what was his first meeting, the Chair had opened the session by reflecting on some of the high-level recommendations arising from the Serota Review and how they might impact the work of BBC England. The Committee had discussed approaches to embedding editorial values and how best to review programme output, particularly across the quantity of output provided by BBC England. The Committee had noted a briefing from the Director, England, on the implementation of the England transformation plan. The savings targets had been realised and the redundancy programme completed. The Chair had commended the team on the scale of this achievement, particularly during the period of the Covid pandemic. The Committee also noted the Audience Report and finished by holding a session with audience members.
- 3.5 The Chair of the Commercial Holdings Board ("CHB") reported on its most recent meeting. CHB had discussed the first look budget for Commercial Holdings and the two main subsidiaries. The plan showed the overall trajectory for drawdown on borrowing to support growth, as well as outline plans for dividends back to the public service. It also discussed an updated overview of the Studios growth plans, which had also been reviewed at previous sessions. CHB also considered a post-investment review and requested that future quarterly reporting provide an overview of key reportable projects and investments of high risk. The Chair of CHB noted that Tom Fussell had subsequently been appointed as CEO, BBC Studios, and welcomed him to the position.
- 3.6 The Chair of the Remuneration Committee briefed the Board on its approval of the salary for the new CEO, BBC Studios and consideration of the salary range and recruitment for a new Director, News and Current Affairs.

Appointment to the Pension Trust Board

- 3.7 The Board approved the re-appointment of Eileen Haughey as an independent trustee on the Pension Board, for a term of three years from 1 January 2022.

Submission to the Public Accounts Committee

- 3.8 The Board approved an annual update for submission to the Public Accounts Committee.

4. Executive Reporting

- 4.1 The Director-General opened the meeting by noting that the BBC had seen a strong financial performance this month, with high numbers of licences in force, including for over-75s. The commercial subsidiaries were also performing well, with most recent forecasts showing Studios on track for a strong year. Tom Fussell had been appointed as CEO, BBC Studios, and he and the team were working to finalise growth plans, which would be coming back to the Board for discussion over the coming months.
- 4.2 The Director-General provided a briefing on ongoing Sports rights discussions, including for the Olympics and the London Marathon, which this year had achieved 1.7m viewers in daytime.
- 4.3 The Board noted the recent performance of the 18.30 regional news programmes which were achieving an average audience of 4.8 million people per night. Directors noted plans to enhance the programmes including the transition to HD broadcast and an update in their look and style.
- 4.4 The Board noted an update on the News modernisation programme and discussed the impact of the senior leadership programme on increasing management effectiveness.
- 4.5 The Director, Content provided an update on audience performance. Despite higher viewing figures during the pandemic, audiences were now dropping, particularly among the young. However, the return of production had ensured that a much richer content offer would be available through the Autumn and Winter season. The Board discussed audiences who consumed little BBC content and how to attract them to BBC services more effectively. The Board agreed that further work on underserved audiences should return to the next meeting.
- 4.6 The Director, News and Current Affairs, provided an update on divisional matters and performance. News had been on strong reporting form this month, including the

Pandora stories and conference coverage. Although audiences had dropped a little since the height of the pandemic there was still a high level of interest in news relating to Covid-19. In operational terms, the increasing infection rate was beginning to affect staffing levels once again. The Board noted an update on the evacuation and support of BBC staff from Afghanistan. The Director-General had met those who had arrived in the UK.

- 4.7 The Director, Nations, provided an update on the preparation for coverage of COP26, which would include both dedicated programming and the use of existing programme strands to highlight the issues. Coverage of the Earthshot Prize had generated very positive feedback.
- 4.8 The Board noted the audience performance update. The Board noted that BARB was launching a new way of measuring viewing which would provide more detail on “unmatched” viewing.
- 4.9 The Chief Operating Officer provided a briefing on progress completing the actions arising from the findings of Lord Dyson’s report into the circumstances around Martin Bashir’s interview of Diana, Princess of Wales for *Panorama* in 1995.
- 4.10 The Board noted an update on broadcast continuity measures following activation of fire suppression systems at Broadcast Centre which had caused a loss of transmission for a number of broadcasters. An update was also provided on recovery measures following the major fire at the Bilsdale transmitting station.
- 4.11 The Board noted an update on operational matters, including progress with major projects and risks. Directors discussed the listing status of the Maida Vale studios.
- 4.12 The Board noted a financial update. A review of financial forecasts was taking place.

2022 Licence Fee Settlement

- 4.13 The Board noted an update on the 2022 Licence Fee settlement.

5. Standards and Impartiality

The Serota Review

- 5.1 The Serota Review was commissioned by the Board, in the light of failings identified in Lord Dyson’s Report into the 1995 *Panorama* interview with Diana, Princess of Wales, as part of its duty to ensure that the BBC’s editorial standards are being upheld. The purpose of the Review was to report on the effectiveness of the BBC’s current editorial

policies, processes and governance and to make recommendations for further improvement.

- 5.2 The Serota Review report had been considered at the previous meeting, and its recommendations approved. Directors had requested that the report return to this meeting of the Board for further consideration following a number of drafting amendments. The Board discussed the final draft of the report.
- 5.3 The Board approved the Serota Review for publication. Sir Nicholas Serota thanked all those who had contributed to it, particularly the external panel members, Caroline Daniel and Chris Banatvala, and support team, Victoria Wakely, Gareth Tuck and Edward Odofin.

An Action Plan on Editorial Standards and Impartiality

- 5.4 The Board considered detailed action plans from the Executive to ensure the highest editorial standards, including impartiality, across BBC programmes and services. These plans incorporated the Executive's initial response to The Serota Review on BBC Editorial Processes, Governance, and Culture.
- 5.5 The Board noted that the Action Plan on Editorial Standards and Impartiality had been taken to an extra-ordinary meeting of the Board's Editorial Guidelines and Standards Committee for discussion. The Committee had approved the Action Plan for onward submission to the Board.
- 5.6 In introducing the Action Plan, the Directors of Content, News and Current Affairs, and the Nations briefed the Board on the importance of impartiality in their areas and the measures they took in order to try and achieve it. It was agreed that impartiality was not solely a question of impartiality on political issues, but in a wider sense the duty of the BBC to represent and reflect the views and experiences of all its audiences. The Board discussed the challenges to impartiality in an environment of increasingly polarised debate and agreed that the Executive's plan to further embed editorial standards and values throughout the organisation would to be helpful in providing staff with increased knowledge and confidence in making editorial judgements.
- 5.7 The Board discussed the plans and methodology for the thematic reviews, which would be commissioned by the Board. It was agreed that a proposal regarding the first thematic review would be submitted for consideration by the Editorial Guidelines and Standards Committee, which would approve a recommendation for the Board to agree ahead of publication of the Action Plan. [Secretary's Note: A proposal by the Executive to conduct the first thematic review on the subject of public spending and taxation was subsequently approved by the Committee and Board].

5.8 The Board approved the Executive's Action Plan on Editorial Standards and Impartiality.

6. iPlayer

6.1 The Board noted and discussed a presentation the performance of iPlayer and plans for its future development.

7. Annual Health and Safety Review

7.1 The Board considered a report outlining health and safety performance for 2020/21 which formed the annual reporting for BBC. Directors noted that the Coronavirus pandemic had had a significant impact on the volume of activity across the BBC. Consequently, the number of injuries, severe incidents, reportable incidents to the regulator and assurance activities had reduced.

7.2 Managing the health and safety of staff during the period of the pandemic had been a key priority. Workplaces and work activities were assessed and managed to ensure Covid-secure arrangements were in place for those essential to business and required to work from a BBC workplace. Workplaces and work activities have been assessed and managed to ensure Covid-secure arrangements are in place for those essential to business and required to work from a BBC workplace. In response to the mental ill-health risks associated with the pandemic, the suite of courses and new workshops had been well received, and uptake numbers represent the desire to manage mental ill-health risks.

8 Audience Deprivation Research

8.1 This discussion was deferred until a future meeting.

9 AOB

9.1 The Board noted that the November Board meeting and awayday would be held in Salford.