

KEY POINTS MADE AT A MEETING BETWEEN THE BBC AND THE NCA NATIONAL DIRECTORS' FORUM - JUNE 2009

The NCA brokered a meeting between Mark Thompson, Director General and Alan Yentob, Creative Director of the BBC and leaders of national organisations. Discussion centred on how the BBC might better connect with arts organisations, broadcasting and the arts generally and challenges arising from the digital agenda. The following is a summary of the main points.

- 1.1 Mark Thompson (MT) stated that the BBC was grappling with rapid change in the sector. New themes and ideas were emerging all the time, particularly in the arts. He referenced the BBC's approach to the Poetry Season and spoke about 'carpet bombing' tactics and that the BBC could act as a 'loud hailer'.
- 1.2 The BBC approached programming on a multi-platform basis and no longer thought about just TV or radio. The entire organisation was now encouraged to approach programming on many levels and the connectivity between these, particularly and including digital opportunities. There was a cultural shift occurring within the Corporation that now recognised that creative input and ideas were equally likely to originate from the technical side of the organisation, as from the editorial side.
- 1.3 The BBC archive was a massive resource and a source of arts heritage for the country. The Corporation was thinking about how it might exploit this resource and share it more fully; for example the recent link up with Tate's exhibition on Francis Bacon, which also drew heavily on the BBC's archive for its website.
- 1.4 MT reported that the BBC had that day signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Arts Council England and was looking at how they might 'liberate' each other's archives.
- 1.5 Alan Yentob (AY) noted that 20 million people used the BBC website every week, including 98% of over 15 year olds. BBC's i-player was becoming a major asset for content in the future and the BBC would act as a broker in this.
- 1.6 The BBC was committed to shifting the bulk of its production out of London. By 2015/16, 50% of BBC employees would be outside London. It was anticipated that each regional BBC centre would act as a hub around which other creative organisations would cluster, which would help to develop better relationships and partnerships. AY noted that the BBC was getting better at working in collaboration with other major organisations and cited the link up with the Manchester International Festival as an example.

- 1.7 AY stressed the importance of education to the BBC's mission and that the Corporation was particularly looking for ways to engage younger people, especially as the numbers of young people watching TV were declining.
- 1.8 It was noted that working with arts organisations in the regions could be an effective way of the BBC reaching and young people, as many arts organisations worked closely with children and young people.
- 1.9 It was noted that arts organisations were increasingly becoming producers of their own content. This raised a whole set of issues regarding rights and distribution which still needed to be fully resolved. The issue of content ownership could act as a barrier to more collaboration with the BBC. However, there were potential opportunities for partnering with organisations to widen access to content.
- 1.10 The potential top slicing of the BBC licence fee and the issue of competitiveness (following the Carter Report) was raised. MT acknowledged that this was a real challenge for the BBC and he recognised that the BBC had a responsibility as the main public service broadcaster to other broadcasters, particularly regional news services. But he was mindful that in relation to the arts on TV, the BBC was increasingly alone in its coverage of the arts.
- 1.11 MT informed the meeting that an Arts Editor would be appointed for BBC News. He also wanted to know from the group what the BBC could do to make its arts programming even better.