

SERIES LEVEL DESCRIPTION
AUDIENCE RESEARCH (R9)**Scope & Content**

The papers relate to the work of the Audience Research Department and consist largely of reports (both statistical and analytical) into listening and viewing habits of television and radio audiences. These can be either specific to individual programmes or on more general topics relating to broadcasting and lifestyle, and cover both the national domestic networks and regional information (the overseas services had their own External Services Audience Research Department). The bulk of the reports are of a standard format produced by the department, with this format changing over time. They were routinely sent to programme producers and senior staff in programme output departments, though they could also be requested by management and other interested parties.

There is also a small amount of departmental correspondence. This correspondence is mainly between members of the department, including the Head of Audience Research, and a wide ranging number of persons and departments within the BBC, including programme makers and management. A large amount of this correspondence originates from the office of the Head of Audience Research.

A summary of the most used reports held by the Written Archives Centre is at the end of this document.

Archival History

The bulk of the material in this section was transferred to the Written Archives Centre directly by the Audience Research (later Broadcasting Research) Department, the files having been stored for many years in the basement of the Langham Hotel building (used by the BBC for many years for extra office space). There were also a small number of files transferred to the Records Centre in September 1988, which came to the Written Archives Centre in June, 1990.

The initial sequence of Audience Research material, consisting of bound volumes of general research reports, special reports, Weekly Audience Summaries and Listening Barometers covering the period 1940-1963, was transferred to the archive by B. Emmett (Head of Audience Research) in May, 1974. This was followed in late 1979 by a large number of Project files covering the period 1959-1967. The next group of files arrived in March 1980, and consisted mainly of paperwork from the office of the Head of Audience Research covering 1937-1972. A large number of Audience Research Reports, covering 1955-1983 arrived in February and March, 1986.

There were no further deposits until June, 1990 when a selection of Research Report Unit survey forms were transferred from the Records Centre, where they had undergone appraisal and selection. Some Audience Research Newsletters 1949-1976 were brought to the Written Archives Centre by a Research Co-ordinator with Broadcasting Research Services in January, 1997. In May, 1997 the Broadcast Research Department transferred some BARB (Broadcasters' Audience Research Board, an independent company providing statistical information about television audiences) reports from 1983-1991, radio reaction reports from 1982-1993, and two special reports: *The People's Activities* (a survey carried out in 1965) and *Daily Life in the 1980s*.

A further deposit was received from the former Audience Research department base in

BBC WRITTEN ARCHIVES CENTRE

Henry Wood House in November 2000, these being a large collection of Special Reports and Audience Reaction Reports dated 1992 to 1997.

Arrangement

The files in this series are arranged numerically, with the various types of audience research material (e.g. reports, barometers, special reports, audience figures) grouped together in various date ranges, depending on when the material arrived in the archive (see Archival History above). There are a few short alphabetic sequences near the start of the series, covering the more general files.

A complete listing of the files in this series is available, including detailed lists of Special Reports and Projects.

Related Areas

The R9 files cover both radio and television audience research, although there is also a separate series of files relating to Television Audience Research (T1), which deals mainly with specific subject areas. The BBC's external services (now World Service) Audience Research material is filed in series E3.

For Audience Research policy, various files can be consulted from the Policy (R34), TV Policy (T16) and Management Registry (R78) sections. There are also a number of files relating to Audience Research in the Publicity section (R44).

Copies of Audience Research Reports are also often found on Programme Files, and audience figures can often be found in *Radio Times* and *Broadcast* magazine. Press cuttings are also a useful source of information for contemporary reaction to programmes.

Administrative History

From the early days of radio there were suggestions from various individuals and departments within the BBC that it would be a good idea to find out what people liked to listen to and why. Initially, pressure came from those concerned with education, but persons like Val Gielgud (Director of Drama) and Charles Siepman (Director of Talks) were also keen for research in this area to occur. They did not consider letters from listeners that arrived via the Programme Correspondence Section or *Radio Times* to provide sufficiently scientific evidence of listening habits or people's feelings about the programmes. John Reith (the Director-General) and others were uneasy about the concept, however, as they feared the introduction of systematic audience research might influence programme planning, if it resulted in programme policy being about chasing high audience ratings, rather than what people ought to listen to and introducing them to new ideas. There were already thoughts of adapting the timing of programmes to suit people's pursuits.

Throughout the early and mid-1930s there were increasing attempts to establish some sort of formal or informal study of listening habits, culminating in a paper submitted to the General Advisory Council in January 1936 by Stephen Tallents (Controller, Public Relations). The Control Board eventually agreed in March, 1936 to establish a small Information Department, under Tallents' Public Relations Division, to deal with research issues, including Listener Research. On 1st October, 1936 R.J.E. Silvey of the London Press Exchange began work as Listener Research Assistant. It was Silvey who established and built up the Listener Research (later Audience Research) department and laid the groundwork for its methods of gathering and analysing data.

Silvey began his research with a series of enquiries into the audiences for various types of programmes. The first of these surveyed listeners to Drama and Features, with 350 respondents from all walks of life asked to complete questionnaires about each play or feature programme they had heard over the course of four months. Whilst its findings did not break much new ground, it was the first time there had been an attempt to survey a representative sample of listeners. This 'panel' method was considered successful and deemed applicable to other programme departments, including Talks, where Listener Research provided valuable feedback on such questions as the qualities listeners expected to find in a good Talks broadcaster. Less representative studies were also carried out. For example, listeners were asked to send in postcards saying what time they preferred certain programmes, which was of interest to certain departments. As those with no strong opinions were less likely to write in, the information this produced was not considered quite so reliable.

Silvey was in favour of random sampling, first suggesting this in July 1937, even though this was not a method condoned by others in the field. Discussions took place about establishing panels to look at the audience's reactions to programmes and also to create a 'listening barometer'. The idea was that a sample of homes should be chosen and the reactions of its occupants tested four or five times a year, using questions that were as simple as possible. The barometer was designed to show not the total audience appeal of particular programmes but the relative sizes of audiences for different types of output.

The first experiment in this area was carried out using Light Entertainment programmes, beginning with a broadcast appeal for volunteers to take part in the study. They would be asked to record whether or not they had listened to particular programmes, and how much of them they had heard. The problem with this was that the volunteers were more likely to listen to this type of programme, and would also have log sheets listing the programmes, meaning they might feel obliged to listen because they had volunteered to take part. A control group was therefore also established, who would be interviewed rather than sent log sheets. Its members were distributed through the regions according to numerical strength of the listening public.

By autumn 1938 there was a great deal known about the listening habits of the BBC's audience. The first random sample had been taken in January, 1938 and there had been detailed enquiries into the popularity of various programmes and types of programmes, such as children's programmes. The research work itself was, however, still largely experimental and the results took time to be distributed, so it could not be said that the findings greatly influenced any programming decisions. It was around this time that Listener Research became part of the Home Intelligence Department of the Public Relations Division.

With the advent of war in September 1939 Listener Research assumed greater importance. Radio was seen as an important tool for communicating with the public. Management needed vital information, such as the areas of the country where reception was defective, in addition to more general research into changes in listening habits and tastes in programmes during wartime. A special report was also prepared into the amount of listening to propaganda broadcast from Germany, including the infamous broadcasts by Lord Haw Haw (William Joyce). Listener research would also serve during wartime to monitor listener preferences and reassure programme planners that even when there was bad news, listeners were still not averse to hearing light entertainment programmes rather than sombre ones.

BBC WRITTEN ARCHIVES CENTRE

In December 1939 Silvey introduced a new method of assessing the amount of listening – a continuous survey that would result in a daily listening barometer. In addition to a posted questionnaire, there would be 800 interviews a day, and the results would be analysed far more quickly than previously. The introduction of the Forces Programme (in addition to the existing Home Service) in 1940 meant Listener Research also had to be carried out on this audience and questionnaires were duly sent.

From 1942 until 1945 the Listener Research department was part of the Programme Division, a change from its previous administrative designation. It remained under programming departments until 1958, going to Entertainment division in 1946 and then to the 'General Division' of Sound Broadcasting in 1957.

Post-war Listener Research continued along established lines, but the television service, which had been in abeyance throughout the war years, introduced a new factor into the equation. Initially however, the Listener Research Department did not feel able to carry out more than ad hoc enquiries in this area, as they were not allowed any extra staff to carry out viewer research, and in any case, the television service was initially confined to the London area. In 1948 a number of viewers were asked to report their views on six particular programmes, via a *Radio Times* 'Vote for Viewers' campaign, but the results were not terribly useful. The final 'Vote for Viewers' in June 1948 invited viewers to apply for a general questionnaire about television, which was designed to give a picture of current attitudes that could be more fully tested at a later date. The 900 responses were not necessarily representative but did provide some indication about people's attitudes to the programmes on offer. The results showed that viewers were not particularly selective about what they watched and were largely satisfied with the television service.

Later in 1948 a more carefully selected sample of viewers was surveyed, alongside a control group of those who did not own a television set. This survey gave a clearer picture of the viewing habits of various age groups and social classes, and also showed that listening to the radio declined with the presence of a television set. It was also found that people were more likely to concentrate solely on viewing whereas when listening to the radio they might do other things at the same time.

In September 1949 it was finally decided that the Television Service should receive audience information comparable to that provided by Listener Research, although the implementation of this decision was delayed until new transmitters came online, giving greater television coverage. At this time the BBC management still seemed quite adverse to the new medium, and were very concerned that viewers were spending so much time watching TV. Once more, they were worried that the audience research results might unduly influence programme makers. A survey was first carried out to find out basic information about the households who had television sets, some information about the types of programmes they watched, and their programming preferences. This showed that items like studio plays were more popular than plays relayed from theatres, and cabaret more popular than revues. More cultural pursuits like opera and ballet divided the audience and it was also found that women preferred outside broadcasts of public and ceremonial events whilst men preferred sporting events.

From the 1st June, 1950 the Listener Research Department became the Audience Research Department, and a Viewing Panel was established to provide statistical information on television audience numbers and to give their views on the programmes. At the end of 1951 the daily interview survey came to be called the Survey of Listening

and Viewing. Surveys looking at variations in viewing between different British regions were also carried out, but concluded that differing tastes in viewing could not be explained by the part of Britain in which people lived.

During the 1950s the influence of television was also seen in the Audience Research Department's listening figures. According to 1954 figures, evening listening fell by 30% for all three radio services (Home, Light & Third). The audiences also seemed more interested in lighter programmes. Radio talks and discussions (which usually followed the 9pm news) showed big losses in audiences, but news, *Saturday Night Theatre* and variety shows were less affected. The 6 p.m. news, which had no competition from TV, did not suffer at all. Another indicator of the loss of audience to television was the fact that by this time a quarter of licences taken out were for both sound and television, compared to one per cent in 1948

The start of commercial television, in the form of ITV (Independent Television), in 1955 meant that there were extra factors for audience research to assess, and its audience measurement techniques were also questioned due to differences in the figures produced by the BBC and its commercial rival. Whereas the BBC's calculations of audience size were based on interviews with individuals, asking what people had watched the previous day, the ITV's TAM (Television Audience Measurement) figures were based on households (i.e. not individuals) and used meter readings rather than interviews, leading to significant discrepancies between the two sets of figures. The BBC, however, retained the advantage of being able to judge audience reaction as well as audience size. As ITV operated through regional franchises, BBC Audience Research also had to adapt to the need to survey audiences area by area in order to achieve realistic comparisons of audience size in the various regions. These statistics were actually purchased by the ITA (Independent Television Authority), the regional ITV contractors and some of the advertisers, although this practice stopped once ITV spread nationwide.

In 1958 the Audience Research department was once more placed under the Administration umbrella, moving away from the programming area to the Secretary's Division, where it remained until 1969, when it moved to the Information Services Division (Information Division from 1977) of the Public Affairs area. By the 1960s Audience Research had approximately one hundred staff divided into six sections. The Fieldwork section dealt with the needs of the 1,300 field interviewers. The Statistics section prepared the daily log sheets for the interviewers, processed the data received and prepared the daily barometers, charts and other statistics. They went through about one and a half million computer punch cards each year (Audience Research was one of the earliest departments within the BBC to have a computer). The Analysis section drafted the questionnaires, tabulated the answers received, assessed the written comment and prepared the final reports, dealing with about 3,000 different broadcasts. Projects and Developments undertook more detailed, long term enquiries into audiences. The Information Desk was responsible for the distribution of reports and dealing with enquiries, whilst the Registry and Records managed the three quarter million documents that were accrued each year and also looked after recruitment and staffing.

Amongst topics dealt with by Audience Research in the 1960s were the advent of BBC-2 and colour television and also the phenomenon of pirate radio stations. A large scale enquiry was carried out about listening to the most famous of these – Radio Caroline.

In 1981 the work of measuring audience size for all television channels was taken over

BBC WRITTEN ARCHIVES CENTRE

by BARB (Broadcast Audience Research Board), a non-profit making company funded by the participating broadcasters and the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising. Around the same time the BBC Audience Research Department became the Broadcasting Research Department, remaining under the Information Division until 1982. It resided here briefly, still under the Public Affairs umbrella, as part of the BBC Data and Broadcasting Research Division. In 1984 it became its own department once again, directly under the Head of Public Affairs, and later the Policy and Planning Unit (from 1988). 1992 saw the compiling of radio audience figures devolved to RAJAR (Radio Joint Audience Research), a company jointly owned by the Commercial Radio Companies Association and the BBC. Despite no longer being directly involved in measuring audiences, the department continued to produce research relating to audience habits and attitudes to programmes and events. By 1995 staffing levels had fallen to less than sixty, as the fieldwork and analysis functions were no longer necessary with the advent of BARB and RAJAR.

In 1997, however, a major reorganisation took place and, following a Policy & Planning Unit review, the department's duties were divided. There was to be no centralised audience research department, although any such research undertaken would still be centrally funded. Researchers based within the various programming related areas of the BBC would in future commission research as required and distribute the results themselves. A hub of the Broadcasting Research Department remained, as part of the Policy and Planning Unit (under Corporate Strategy), to act as a central point of contact as to where material was held, and urgent queries were answered by the Information Desk, which was transferred to the Broadcast division. In 1999 the remaining part of the Broadcasting Research Department again became Audience Research, and the other researchers, whilst still working within programming departments on a day to day basis, returned administratively to the centralised department. In the year 2000 this department was moved to the Marketing Division.

Audience & Consumer Research has become a key part of the Marketing, Communications & Audiences division. This area's core function is to undertake consumer research aimed at finding out about the BBC's audiences, and provides BBC staff with access to recent audience information, thereby resuming some of the functions of the previous Audience Research department.

Further reference:

Persons interested in learning more about the history and methods of the Audience Research Department should consult Robert Silvey's book *Who's Listening: The Story of BBC Audience Research* (Lond., Allen & Unwin, 1974. ISBN 0 04 384001 9). Asa Briggs' *A History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* also contains information about the early days of audience research.

c. 112, 500 items
3,564 files
1937-1997

BBC WRITTEN ARCHIVES CENTRE

SUMMARY OF AUDIENCE RESEARCH REPORTS HELD BY BBC WRITTEN ARCHIVES CENTRE

Researchers are asked to note that this list is *not* exhaustive, and that the R9 Audience Research shelf list and accompanying lists of reports should be consulted for a full overview of Audience Research material held by the archive.

Statistical information on numbers of listeners and viewers

These reports include numerical measurements of the numbers of people listening to or viewing programmes (sometimes called ratings). The size and composition of the samples (panels) and assumptions about how this relates to the population are usually indicated on the forms. See also section on Combined Reports.

- **Radio Listening Barometer:** 03/12/1938 - 14/08/1981
Weekly, later daily, report detailing audience figures for individual radio programmes. **BBC WAC Refs. R9/11; R9/12 and R9/42**
TV viewing figures included between 29/06/1952 - 31/12/1964
BBC WAC Ref. R9/35/1 - 14
- **Radio Monthly Reports:** 04/07/1981 – 31/12/1984
Monthly report detailing audience figures for radio programmes.
BBC WAC Ref. R9/42/1 - 10
- **TV Audience Figures:** first shown on Daily Listening Barometer 29/06/1952
BBC WAC Ref. R9/12/7
- **TV Daily Summary/Viewing Barometer:** 06/10/1957 – 02/08/1981
Daily report detailing audience figures for individual television programmes.
BBC WAC Ref. R9/40/1 - 10
Called Viewing Barometer from 03/07/1965 **BBC WAC Ref. R9/37/1 - 17**
- **TV Weekly Summary:** 15/01/1950 - 05/10/1957
Weekly report detailing audience figures for individual television programmes.
BBC WAC Ref. R9/8/1 - 3
- **Commercial TV (ITV) Audiences:** first shown on London Region TV Weekly Summary 22/09/1955. Please note that this is a different report from the TV Weekly Summary above. **BBC WAC Ref. R9/45/1**
Later included on Daily Summaries/Viewing Barometer, as detailed above.
- **BARB (Broadcast Audience Research Board) TV audience figures:** 03/01/1983 – 29/12/1991
Audience figures for individual television programmes. Please note that although the BBC began receiving audience figures from BARB starting 03/08/1981, the Written Archive Centre holdings start from 1983.
BBC WAC Ref. R9/1146 - 1154

Reports relating to listener and viewer reaction to programmes:

These reports assign numerical values to the level of listener or viewer satisfaction with programmes (Reaction Indices or Audience Appreciation Indices), and many also include written analysis of the panel's responses and comments.

- **Radio Audience Reaction Reports (subject): 1937-1969**
These special reports are designed to provide an analysis of the audience and their reactions to programming. The early reports and enquiries are divided by subject and filed in bound volumes. Some relate to specific programmes, and are in the same format as the later Listener Research Reports (see below) whilst others are more detailed and cover broader areas, such as children's programming.
BBC WAC Refs. R9/9/1 - 33 & R9/53/ - 71
- **Radio Audience Reaction Reports (chronological): 30/12/1951 - 31/12/1991, 1995**
These are variously called:
Listener Research Reports: 30/12/1951 - 10/10/1953
Audience Research Reports: 11/10/1953 - 01/05/1980
Listening Panel Reports: 01/05/1980 - 31/12/1991, 1995
These reports assign both numerical values to viewer satisfaction with individual programmes and provide written analysis of the listener responses. They are usually between two & four pages in length and are in a standard format. See also Listening Reports and Special Reports.
BBC WAC Refs. R9/6/1-318 (1951 - 1984); R9/1036 - 1065 (1985 - 1991) & R9/2180 - 2182 (1995)
- **Listening Reports: 1970-1982**
As above, but providing a more in depth analysis of reactions to programmes and information about audiences, usually as a result of studies undertaken over a longer time frame.. Later called Special Reports (see below)
BBC WAC Ref. R9/850 - 945
- **Radio Reaction indices: 03/01/1987 - 28/09/1990**
These reports assign a numerical value indicating appeal of selected radio programmes, without any written analysis or any breakdown of reaction figures.
BBC WAC Ref. R9/1103 - 1105
- **Radio Reaction weekly reports: 15/02/1992 - 21/01/1994**
These reports assign numerical values to listener satisfaction with selected radio programmes, also broken down by age, gender and social class.
BBC WAC Ref. R9/1110 - 1112
- **TV Audience Reaction Reports (BBC): 15/01/1950 - 20/11/1991, 1995**
Known variously as:
Viewer Research Reports: 15/01/1950 -10/10/1953
Audience Research Reports: 11/10/1953 - 30/04/1980
TV Viewing Panel Reports: 30/04/1980 - 30/04/1982
TV Audience Reaction Reports: 09/11/1982 - 20/11/1991, 1995
These reports assign both numerical values to viewer satisfaction with individual programme and provide written analysis of the viewer responses. They are

BBC WRITTEN ARCHIVES CENTRE

usually between two & four pages in length and are in a standard format. See also Viewing Reports and Special Reports.

BBC WAC Refs. R9/7/1 - 176 (1950 - 1982); R9/1092 - 1100 (1982 - 1991) & R9/2171 - 2180 (1995)

- **Viewing Reports:** 1970-1982
As above, but providing a more in depth analysis of reaction to programmes and information about audiences, usually as a result of studies undertaken over a longer time frame. Later called Special Reports (below).
BBC WAC Ref. R9/730 - 849
- **TV Audience Appreciation Reports (BARB):** 11/07/1982 - 30/12/1984
Audience reaction to programmes expressed as a numerical value, with no written comment. Figures are broken down by age, sex and social class.
BBC WAC Ref. R9/34/1 - 6
- **TV Reaction indices:** 01/08/1981 - 30/04/1982
Audience reaction to programmes expressed as a numerical value, with no written comment or breakdown of figures.
BBC WAC Ref. R9/1128 - 9
- **Special Reports, Continuous Service Reports, Information Services Reports (Radio & TV):** 1982-1997
These reports provide more in depth analysis of audience reaction to programming and also detailed information about audiences, usually as a result of longer term studies of various types of viewing and listening. These reports are usually in the format of small booklets and are considerably longer than the ordinary Audience Research Reports. See also Listening Reports and Viewing Reports.
BBC WAC Refs. R9/75 - 727; R9/949 - 1002; R9/1003 - 1035 & R9/2125 - 2170

Combined Reports – Audience Research Bulletins

All the audience research bulletins listed below were designed to give a summary of the information obtained each week relating to audience figures and audience reactions, usually referring both to networks as a whole and to selected programmes, though later reports are broader in scope. Early reports also included some written analysis of the results, and concentrated more on audience satisfaction than audience numbers. By the early 1950s, however, reports were focussing on numbers of viewers and listeners, sometimes to the exclusion of information about audience satisfaction.

- **Listener Research Weekly Report/Listener Research Bulletin:** 20/07/1940 - 27/06/1953 (called Listener Research Bulletin from 30/11/1941; viewing mentioned from 30/12/1951).
Summarises audience reaction figures, with written commentary.
BBC WAC Ref. R9/1/1 - 14

BBC WRITTEN ARCHIVES CENTRE

- **Supplements to Listener Research Bulletins:** 23/12/1945 – 01/11/1952
Show comparative figures for audience numbers and audience appreciation, with no written analysis.
BBC WAC Ref. R9/3/1 - 4
- **Viewer Research Bulletin (Monthly):** 15/01/1950 - 27/06/1953
Summarises both audience numbers and audience satisfaction figures, with written commentary.
BBC WAC Ref. R9/4/1
- **Audience Research Bulletin (Weekly):** 28/06/1953 - 04/05/1979
Concentrates mainly on figures detailing audience numbers for both radio and television
BBC WAC Ref. R9/2/1 - 51
- **Radio Weekly Bulletin:** 05/05/1979 - 02/10/1992
Summarises audience share for radio networks and selected programmes. Some figures also included relating to audience reaction.
BBC WAC Refs. R9/38/1 - 5 & R9/1113 - 1122
- **Radio Monthly Summary:** 21/12/1992 - 23/10/1994
Concentrates entirely on network audience figures, with no information on programmes.
BBC WAC Ref. R9/1101 - 1102
- **TV Weekly Bulletin:** 05/05/1979 - 02/01/1983
Summarises audience share for TV networks along with a viewing satisfaction index. Earlier reports given figures for selected programmes, whilst later reports have a broader focus.
BBC WAC Ref. R9/39/1 - 7