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Evaluation of the Audio Content Fund

October 2022



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Audio Content Fund Evaluation

- 91 unique organisations in receipt of funding
- 165 grants awarded

Evaluated by
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Social and economic research
Ymchwil cymdeithasol ac economaidd



Audience Reach

- 350 radio stations involved across the UK
- 57.7 million listeners (gross total)
- A third of grant recipients have reused or repurposed their content to extend reach beyond the live broadcasts

Audience Location

- 71% of grants awarded outside of London
- 7% of the fund's grant spent on non-English Indigenous languages



Grant recipients



44% of grant recipients were able to **create new jobs**



One in five projects had a **primary diversity** focus



1/3 of projects have involved **new voices**

Additionality

89% of productions are solely funded by the Fund

85% of grant recipients have developed **new public service content** that they would not have been able to create otherwise

Plurality

Combined projects have provided **735 hours** of innovative and original public service broadcasts

Projects have covered different genres, providing a **rich and diverse catalogue** of content

One in five broadcast partners have recommissioned further public service content



Value for Money

Up to **40 full time jobs** and up to **200 part time jobs** have been created

The Fund has supported **9,842 freelancer days**

Grant recipients have **doubled** the number of **contracted freelancer days** used following project completion

Opportunities

68% of grant recipients said the funding opened opportunities to produce more public service content

47% of grant recipients expect an increase in the volume of public service content over next 5 years

1. Summary

Introduction and background

The Audio Content Fund, launched in April 2019 as part of the Contestable Fund pilot, aimed to encourage greater innovation and experimentation by taking pressure off commercial and community stations and providers to seek sponsorship and advertising revenue to fund original public service content. In particular, the Fund focused on supporting independent audio producers to try something different, particularly new voices who do not have an established relationship with broadcasters, and therefore lack access to funding.

Research aims and objectives

The evaluation focused on providing a full impact and process evaluation of the Fund covering the three years of its operation. It has responded to the key research questions set out by The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, namely:

- To assess of the impact of the fund on successfully supported organisations, on audiences, on the UK's wider creative economy, and on the provision of commercially underserved genres of radio content.
- To identify what worked well and less well in the implementation and delivery process, including assessing the appropriateness of the fund's key evaluation criteria.

Fund design and delivery

Feedback from sector representatives, independent panel members, audio producers and broadcasters indicate that **the Fund has been well promoted, achieving strong reach into the independent audio production sector and independent radio sector**. Across the three years of delivery, the Fund received 492 applications, of which 165 were successful. A total of 91 unique organisations received grant funding across the successful bids. **The grant funding has made a positive contribution to supporting growth and development for younger audio production companies (incorporated in the last three years), in addition to more established organisations.**

Approaching two thirds of projects (60%) worked with commercial radio stations, around one third (35%) with community radio stations and the remainder worked with both. The monitoring data for the Fund highlights the range of genres evident across the successful grant applications, which has contributed to the diversity of the content produced. Nearly all grant recipients were positive about the overall process of applying for an ACF grant, indicating a robust application and assessment process.

Performance against the Fund's eligibility criteria

Bids submitted to the Fund were measured against eight eligibility criteria set by DCMS. The mandatory criteria included: Quality, Additionality and Audience Reach. The supplementary criteria included: Nations and Regions, Diversity, Innovation, New Voices, and Plurality.

Evidence presented in this report demonstrates that the Fund has been successful in achieving its objectives across all of the eight eligibility criteria set by DCMS.

Quality

Quality assurance has been well embedded in the application and assessment process, drawing on the considerable experience and technical knowledge of the independent panel. A further stage of quality assurance has been built into the process by broadcast partners who have final sign-off on the content prior to it being aired. Many projects have secured wider sector recognition and awards, demonstrating the high-quality content produced by grant recipients.

Additionality

Feedback from broadcasters has emphasised that the content produced through the grant funding would have been difficult to produce without Audio Content Fund investment. For the majority (89%) of grant recipients, their production was solely funded by the Fund. **Eight five percent of grant recipients indicated that the funding has enabled them to develop new public service content that they would not have been able to create otherwise.** The funding has also supported the production of genres including comedy, documentaries and drama that have previously been dominated by the BBC and in decline in commercial radio broadcasts. This demonstrates the additionality that has been achieved through the administration of the Fund.

Audience Reach

The expectations for funded projects were for them to deliver significant audience reach through prominent scheduling on national, regional, local and small commercial and community stations. **The Fund has secured a broadcast commitment from 350 radio stations and has recorded a gross total of 57.7 million listeners across the 165 projects**, with 95% of this attributed to commercial stations. The true reach of the Fund, across the diverse range of projects, is likely to be far greater given that **around a third (32%) of grant recipients report to have reused or repurposed the content** following the completion of their grant.

Nations and Regions

Across the three years of the fund's delivery, **71% of the projects were awarded to suppliers outside of London.** A total of seven percent of the fund's grant budget has been spent on content in non-English UK Indigenous languages. Across the Years one and two of the Fund six percent of the grant budget was spent on English-language content broadcast on local stations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In Year three, 13% of the grant budget was spent on bilingual content produced in English and at least one other UK Indigenous language. For the projects broadcasting on national stations, commitments were widely made to ensure contributors were from a wide range of backgrounds, representative of the whole UK.

Diversity and New Voices

The assessment process provided merit to productions that promoted diversity both on and off air, and projects which tackle under-representation, including gender, disability, age, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. **Around one in five projects had a primary diversity focus and approaching a third of projects have involved new voices.** Collectively these have addressed sensitive issues around prejudice and discrimination, covered subjects around intersectionality, provided a voice to seldom or unheard voices and offered a platform to explore difference. They have also engaged and involved new voices in the process of producing and broadcasting the content.

Innovation

The funding has enabled independent audio producers and broadcast partners to pursue a range of ideas and approaches that would have been difficult to secure funding for otherwise. It has provided space for concepts and ideas to be nurtured and developed, drawing on a range of contemporary issues and themes for inspiration. **The public service content produced has pushed the boundaries for broadcast partners whilst also allowing independent audio producers to develop new concepts and collaborations to engage, inspire, educate and move listeners.** Many of the broadcasts have tested new ways of working, including innovative methods of capturing and telling stories, of getting under the skin of communities and providing a platform to hidden voices. Delivery of the Fund has provided a proof of concept on the contribution that independent audio producers and the independent radio sector can make to responding swiftly and creatively to key issues facing society.

Plurality

Prior to the launch of the fund in 2019, examples of public service content on commercial radio outside of news and sport, travel, weather, charity appeals, and local events were rare, with most public service programming provided by the BBC. **The 165 funded projects have provided 735 hours of innovative and original public service broadcasts.** Projects have covered different genres, providing a rich and diverse catalogue of content. As such, it has contributed to additional content over and above that directly funded through grant awards.

Impact of the Fund on grant recipients

Feedback from grant recipients points to longer-term, legacy impacts with individual production companies using the funds to help develop relationships with commercial commissioning partners. **Just under half (44%) of grant recipients reported that the use of the funds has enabled them to create new jobs.**

Around two thirds (68%) of grant recipients report that the funding has **opened opportunities for them in producing additional public service broadcast content.** The same proportion also agree that their ACF project has supported them in improving their financial position.

Around half (47%) of grant recipients stated that they expected to increase the volume of public service content that they create over the next five years. The Fund has **encouraged around one in five broadcast partners to recommission further public service content.**

Impact reports submitted by grant recipients present compelling evidence of the difference that the content has made to individuals and communities. Delivery of the Fund has provided a proof of concept on the contribution that independent audio producers and the independent radio sector can make to responding swiftly and creatively to key issues facing society, most notably through the two additional themed rounds, namely Winter Loneliness and Supporting Audiences During Coronavirus.

Value for money and Gross Value Added

Following completion of their project, many grant recipients were able to **diversify their income sources**, improving their resilience and supporting the wider sector. Grant recipients have reported increases in the number of staff they employ. In-house survey data captured by ACF Ltd and our own survey data estimates that **up to 40 full time jobs and up to 200 part time jobs have been created due to the Fund.** On average each project supported 60 freelancer days. When scaled across the total number of projects, this would equate to 9,842 freelancer days. **Grant recipients have also doubled the number of contracted freelancer days they are using following the completion of their project.**

Total Gross Value Added impacts of the Audio Content Fund grant outlay for funded projects is estimated at £2.821m. The GVA analysis undertaken for the evaluation indicates that the return on investment is likely to be above £1 for every £1 invested. In other words, the fund has generated more value than the pilot cost. Analysis of the cost per production minute also suggests the Audio Content Fund has achieved good value on the outputs produced relative to the industry norm.

Recommendations

A small number of recommendations are presented to inform the design of any similar funds in the future.

1. The breadth and quality of public service content produced across the Audio Content Fund has the potential to provide valuable education and learning resources to support continued social benefits for individuals and communities. Subject to licensing requirements, the design of any similar future funding should consider allocating resource to draw these together as material for use by education institutions and VCSFE organisations.
2. The design and development of any similar funding should be supported by organisations representing the intended key recipients.
3. The funding requirements for any future funds could consider giving merit for applicants that accommodate work experience and placements to support young people seeking to gain experience within the sector.

4. The design of any similar funding in the future could also consider enabling or encouraging collaborative bids from independent audio producers.
5. Any future funding should consider providing resource or guidance within the grant funding awards to enable broadcasters to capture feedback from listeners, including those engaging with live content as well as through podcasts and streamed services.
6. The design of any similar funds in the future should review the capacity needs of managing the programme based on a projected number of rounds and applications but also to include the facilitation of networking events across independent audio producers and establishing dialogue with prospective investors such as Government Departments and Trusts and Foundations.
7. Whilst the focus on funding content that will be broadcast live on the radio should be retained, the design of any future funds should also encourage or require grant recipients to repurpose content for wider dissemination via on-demand and streaming services. This will help to extend reach and engage audiences who are less likely to engage with live on-air content and reflect evolving radio and audio listening habits.

2. Introduction and Background

This section of the report introduces the Contestable Fund and presents context behind the launch of the Audio Content Fund. It also outlines the objectives for the evaluation including the key research questions.

The decline of public service broadcasting

Commercial and community radio play an important role in the daily lives of millions of people across the UK, providing entertainment, informing and supporting listeners. Commercial radio has a wide audience reach and is listened to by 65% of UK adults (over 35 million people) every week.¹ The UK has also witnessed strong growth in the community radio sector in recent years, from a handful of stations granted a licence in 2005 to more than 300 stations broadcasting at the end of the 2019/20 financial year.² Separately from radio broadcasters, there are around 150 audio production companies based across the UK, producing high-quality programmes for radio broadcast.

Public service programming is a critical part of the UK's broadcasting landscape and the foundation stone of the UK's television and radio experience. Public service programming is of both social and economic importance, promoting a sense of shared space, awareness of the diversity of other lives and views. It enables a shared enjoyment of a wide range of cultural and sporting occasions and plays an important economic function in supporting the wider UK creative industries, particularly the independent production sector.³

Despite the importance of public service programming, research by Ofcom has identified a decline in the production of key genres and concerns have been raised about the BBC's dominance of certain radio genres such as comedy, documentaries, drama and religious programmes. Research published by [Radiocentre](#) in 2016 reported that examples of public service content outside national and local news on commercial radio are rare, as most public service programming is provided by the BBC. While commercial radio stations broadcast an average of 13 hours of public service content each week, delivering significant public value, most of this consists of news and sport, travel, weather, charity appeals and local events.⁴

¹ Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (2018)- 'Contestable Fund Pilot: Supporting Young Audiences and Audio.

Content. 19th October 2018.

² View further details of the [community radio sector](#).

³ Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (2018)- 'Contestable Fund Pilot: Supporting Young Audiences and Audio.

Content. 19th October 2018.

⁴ Radiocentre (2016)- Action Stations: The Public Value of Commercial Radio.

Long-form genres such as documentary, comedy, and drama are almost entirely broadcast by the BBC. Due to the size and scale of the BBC's offering and the difficulty of monetising return, commercial radio has, so far, been unable to invest in more costly public service content.

Changes to the BBC's commissioning of radio and audio, announced in 2015, gave the UK's radio independent sector more opportunities to invest and create content. The sector now has the capacity to produce more high-quality public service programmes for broadcasting on commercial and other radio networks, including programmes for younger audiences. However, scope to do so has been limited due to the commercial pressures on such broadcasters.

Overview of the Contestable Fund

The 2016 white paper, [A BBC for the future: a broadcaster of distinction](#),⁵ set out the intention to establish a pilot for a contestable public service content fund of up to £60 million. The pilot would aim to create new opportunities for other broadcasters and producers to make public service broadcasting content. This would help to drive plurality, competition and innovation to support a well-functioning industry that delivers for audiences of all ages and backgrounds.

A public consultation, launched in December 2016, sought views from broadcasters, producers, viewers and others on how a fund could operate and would best strengthen the value for money provision and plurality of public service content. There was considerable support for the creation of a 'Contestable Fund.' In December 2017, the government response to the consultation confirmed the establishment of a Contestable Fund pilot and outlined the initial shape of the Fund. In October 2018, the Government announced its plans for a three year 'contestable fund' pilot scheme of up to £60million that would support the provision and plurality of public service content in genres and networks where it is currently financially difficult to fund production. This included plans for the launch of an Audio Content Fund, which would assign up to £3million to support a broad range of public service audio content, on a wider range of UK radio stations

About the Audio Content Fund

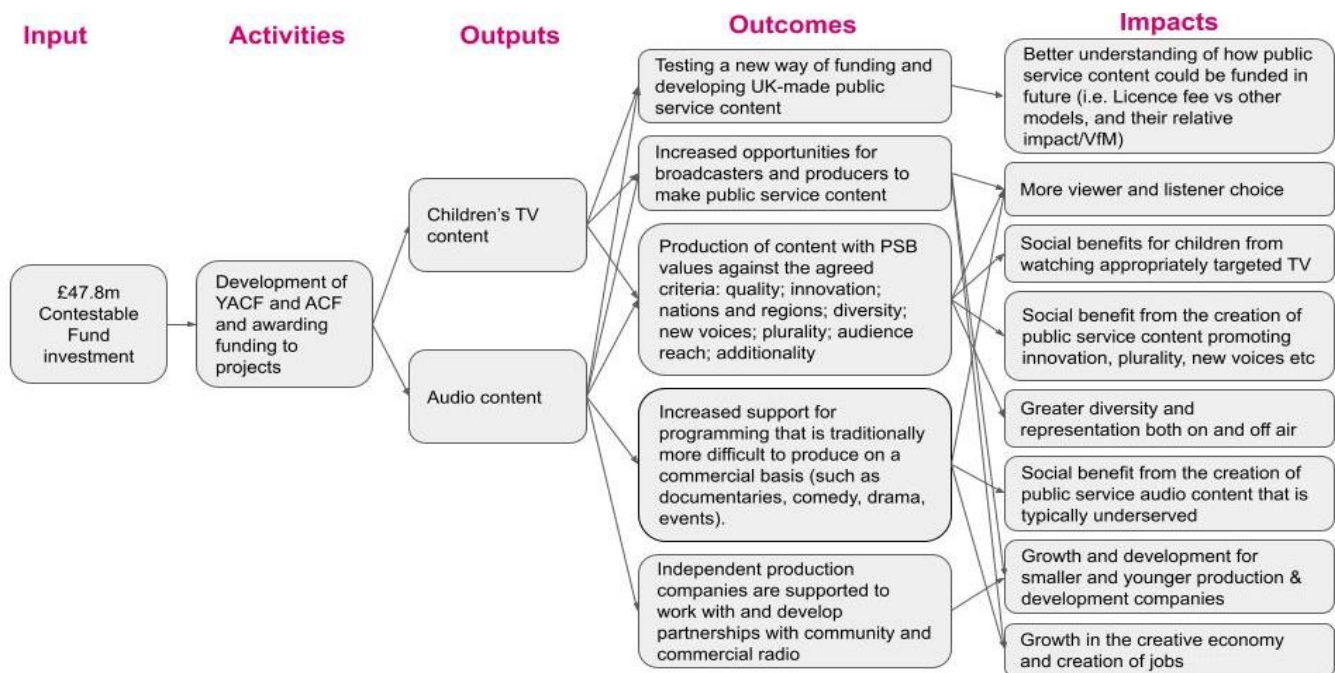
The Audio Content Fund (the Fund), launched in April 2019, aimed to encourage greater innovation and experimentation by taking pressure off commercial and community stations and providers to seek sponsorship and advertising revenue to fund original public service content. In particular, the Fund focused on supporting independent audio producers to try something different, particularly new voices who do not have an established relationship with broadcasters, and therefore lack access to funding.

⁵ Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (2016)- 'A BBC for the Future: a Broadcaster of Distinction'.

The premise of the Fund recognised that while the commercial radio market for content is expanding, it is still relatively small for public service programming and unlikely to grow without support. Considering the small cost of producing radio programmes in comparison to television, the Fund aimed to provide a boost to radio producers and audio public service programming. The Fund has been administered by an independent not-for-profit organisation created by [Radiocentre](#) and [AudioUK](#), also called Audio Content Fund Ltd.

The Theory of Change established for the Fund, provided in Figure 2.1 below, outlined the high-level outcomes and impacts envisaged through the distribution of grant funding. This research report provides an assessment of the progress that the Fund has made to achieving these.

Figure 2.1: Audio Content Fund Theory of Change



Source: The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

Research Aims and Objectives

Our research report responds to the aims and objectives set out by The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) for the delivery of a full impact and process evaluation of the Fund covering the three years of its operation. The key research questions that this report addresses are:

1. An assessment of the impact of the fund on successfully supported organisations, on audiences, on the UK's wider creative economy, and on the provision of commercially underserved genres of radio content.
2. Identification of what worked well and less well in the implementation and delivery process, including assessing the appropriateness of the fund's key evaluation criteria.



3. Research Method

This section of the report provides a brief overview of the research method used to evaluate the delivery and impact of Audio Content Fund over the three years of its delivery from 2019 to 2022.

Theory of Change

Our research team adopted a theory-based approach to evaluating the fund, in line with the guidance outlined in the HM Treasury's Magenta Book.⁶ This has included primary and secondary research activities to ascertain the progress that the Fund has made towards achieving the outcomes and impacts outlined in its Theory of Change. We developed a light touch Qualitative Comparative Analysis method to deliver a theory-based evaluation supported by quantifiable data captured through the Fund's monitoring systems and our fieldwork. We have sought to test the causal links between the content produced through the grant funding awards and the outcomes delivered for independent audio producers, broadcast partners, listeners and the wider independent production sector.

Desk Based Review

To provide context for the evaluation, our team reviewed a range of relevant publications covering the broadcast sector, creative industries, DCMS policy documents and research published by Ofcom. These are referenced throughout the body of this report. Our team also reviewed all documentation pertaining to the administration and monitoring of the Fund, including bidding guidelines,⁷ annual reports, details of applications including their outcome and results of an in-house survey on grant recipients administered by the ACF Managing Director in 2021. Our research team also reviewed 109 Impact Reports,⁸ submitted by grant recipients at the completion of their project. These reports were used to draw out key themes and evidence of the impact of the funding on grant recipients, broadcast partners and the listenership. This analysis, along with the 2021 survey findings, were cross-referenced with the primary data captured by our research team as outlined below.

Survey of Grant Applicants

To capture feedback from across all grant applications, our research team designed and disseminated light-touch online surveys to both successful and unsuccessful applicants. The survey for successful applicants was forwarded to all 91 independent audio producers in receipt of funding.

⁶ HM Treasury (2020)- ['Magenta Book Central Government guidance on evaluation'](#).

⁷ Audio Content Fund (2021)- 'Bidding Guidelines Document- v7: April 2021'.

⁸ Impact reports were introduced as a monitoring process part way through the delivery of the fund. Projects awarded in earlier rounds were not required to submit these.

This included organisations that had submitted multiple applications, including successful and unsuccessful bids. A total of 66 organisations provided a response, equating to a strong response rate of 73% of all grant recipients. As many organisations received more than one grant, the responses captured through the online survey covered 110 (67%) of the total of 165 grants awarded through the fund. A brief online survey was also disseminated to the 66 applicants that did not secure any funding regardless of the number of bids submitted. A total of 16 responses were received, equating to a response rate of 24%.

Deep Dive Interviews

To complement online survey responses, our team completed deep dive qualitative interviews between August and October 2022 with a sample of grant recipients and broadcasters. This sample was drawn across the three years of the Fund and constructed to ensure representation across different genres, diversity focus on status of the broadcast partner (commercial or community). Interviews were completed for 31 grants including the independent audio producer(s) and broadcast partner. These interviews provided our team with an opportunity to explore in further depth experiences of the fund and to understand the impact of the grants awarded on organisations, their broadcast partners and audiences.

Value for Money Assessment

Value for money assessment of the Audio Content Fund has been based on several approaches and indicators. Firstly, a narrative description of the change in turnover and employment among beneficiaries before and after their grant has been presented to show the general performance. This can be compared at a high level to the wider sector performance in ONS data and demonstrate the relative performance of Audio Content Fund funded organisations. Self-attribution from beneficiary organisations surveyed shows the impact that they perceive the grant to have had on employment demonstrated some of the quantifiable value creation against the jobs indicator over the longer term. Direct GVA has been modelled based on the value of the grant awarded and average GVA ratios for the programming and broadcasting services 2 digit SIC code sector. Assumptions on multipliers provide indirect and induced benefits to generate total estimates of GVA created. Supporting these assessments, the evaluation has also considered listener hour costs and production per minute costs for grant recipients projects where there are some industry benchmarks with which to compare outputs.

Caveats and Limitations

Although the survey of grant recipients achieved a strong response rate and is likely to be indicative of the views of all independent audio producers in receipt of funding, it is not necessarily representative. The survey of applicants who never secured a funding award received a much lower response rate and so may not reflect the views of this cohort of companies.

The challenge of engaging organisations that were unsuccessful in their bidding to the Audio Content Fund has meant that it has not been possible to establish a control group of independent audio providers. This has influenced the approach used to assess additionality and establish a counterfactual position which has focused on reflections from companies awarded funding on what their likely position would have been in the absence of the Fund.

Although the application and assessment process has been based around eight eligibility criteria, our research team has not had access to all application form data. As such, there are gaps in our knowledge around how each project responded to the mandatory and supplementary criteria. Whilst some of this has latterly been included in Impact Reports submitted by projects at their completion, this process was introduced part way through the delivery of the Fund.

Assessing the value for money of the Audio Content Fund presents a number of challenges. Firstly, estimates of GVA rely on assumptions for the wider programme and broadcasting sector, rather than just audio. Secondly, there is no identified baseline with which to compare GVA and employment outputs achieved. Thirdly assumptions on deadweight, displacement and leakage are based on the survey data available and all figures are extrapolated and scaled to the whole population which reduces the robustness of any assessment. Fourthly, there are some challenges with the accuracy of listenership and duration of content data, as well as outliers which may influence the results (though median averages have been used where appropriate to reduce the influence of outliers).

Finally, although the parameters of the research as set out by DCMS aimed to understand the impact of the funded public service broadcasts on listeners, there has been no systematic way of gathering this data by grant recipients or their broadcast partners. Whilst robust audience reach data has been captured and anecdotal evidence gathered through interviews and light touch information gleaned from submitted impact reports, it has not been possible to determine the true impact and social benefit for listeners. This is an area that should be addressed in the design of any similar funds in the future.

4. Fund Design and Delivery

This section of the report provides an overview and assessment of the design and delivery of the fund. This draws on feedback from sector bodies, members of the independent industry panel and from grant applicants.

Summary

- Feedback from sector representatives, independent panel members, audio producers and broadcasters indicate that the Fund has been well promoted, achieving strong reach into the two sectors.
- The Fund received 492 applications across the three years of delivery, of which 165 were successful. A total of 91 unique organisations received grant funding across the successful bids.
- Approaching two thirds of projects (60%) worked with commercial radio stations, around one third (35%) with community radio stations and the remaining four percent worked with both.
- Monitoring data highlights is the range of genres evident across the successful grant applications, which has contributed to the diversity of the content produced.
- The 165 funded projects have provided 735 hours of innovative and original public service broadcasts.
- For the majority (89%) of grant recipients, their production was solely funded by the Fund. This points to strong additionality, with the public service content produced unlikely to have been created in the absence of the Fund.
- The Fund has made a positive contribution to supporting growth and development for younger audio production companies.
- Nearly all grant recipients were positive about the overall process of applying for an ACF grant, indicating a robust application and assessment process.

Fund Design and Promotion

The architecture of the Fund was developed collaboratively by Audio UK and Radiocentre, ensuring that it accounted for the needs of the respective audio production and commercial radio sectors, whilst responding directly to the ambition set out in the Contestable Fund White Paper. In designing the Audio Content Fund, comparable schemes were reviewed including for example the [Broadcasting Fund](#) administered by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, with funding from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media in Ireland.

It is unclear to what extent representative bodies for the community radio sector such as the Community Media Association (CMA) were involved in the detailed design of the Fund. This should be considered in the design and development of any similar funds in the future to ensure that organisations representing the intended key recipients are appropriately engaged and involved.

Applicants were able to bid for projects of any size, although the Fund was subject to State Aid rules, which meant that no one bidding company could receive more than €200,000 during a rolling three-year period from all sources of public funding. This limit has ensured that the available funds have been distributed across a broad range of independent audio producers, maximising its benefit on the sector. Bidders receiving funding had to provide a commitment that the content would be broadcast within 12 months of approval and that post-transmission reporting was also provided within this timeframe.

Bids submitted to the Fund were measured against eight eligibility criteria set by DCMS and two additional criteria set by the funding panel.⁹ The mandatory criteria set by DCMS included: Quality, Additionality and Audience Reach. The supplementary criteria included: Nations and Regions, Diversity, Innovation, New Voices, and Plurality. The two additional criteria set by the independent panel related to: audience impact and naming a senior responsible editorial figure.

The Fund did not include any quotas or targets for the proportion of funded projects working with commercial radio stations and community radio stations. Independent audio producers were free to engage multiple broadcasters to secure the required broadcaster commitment to air the public service content. One of the key themes raised during consultations with broadcasters and members of the independent panel of industry experts was the extent to which the Fund had taken account of the different resource and funding context of each sector.

The ACF funding was able to cover broadcast radio content, including at the discretion of the panel the production costs of directly related on-air promotional content. Funding could not be used for advertisement slots and non-broadcast material (such as videos, websites, social media or printed material). Funding could also not be used for the staging of events, though it was available for content created at or via events, staff development or training or “pay to play” fees as the expectation was for stations to broadcast the content free of charge.¹⁰

The Bidding Guidelines did not make any specific reference to supporting collaborative bids. Supporting collaborations may have been advantageous, providing an opportunity for independent audio producers to share their capacity, resources and specialisms in support the production of original public service content. For example, enabling a company with reach into and connections with the LGBTQ+ community to partner with a company with the technical skills and infrastructure to produce high-quality content.

⁹ Audio Content Fund (2021)- ‘Bidding Guidelines Document- v7: April 2021’.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Encouraging, as opposed to mandating, collaboration has the potential to provide longer-term benefits for the sector in terms of its ability to bid for future, larger scale commissions as well as sharing good practice and innovation to maximise the reach of content beyond the life of the live broadcast. This should be incorporated into the design of any similar funding in the future.

Feedback from sector representatives, members of the independent panel, audio producers and broadcasters indicate that the Fund has been well promoted, achieving strong reach into the two sectors. To a substantial extent, this has been down to the work of Radiocentre and AudioUK who set up the not-for-profit company to administer the Fund, highlighting the significant advantages of having a grant funding programme embedded within the two sectors. The three-year duration of the programme has also provided benefits in terms of enabling reach within the independent audio production sector, allowing smaller and younger companies with less experience the opportunity to bid for funding.

Notification of the opening of each round of funding has been cascaded via the regularly updated website, through the [Fund's twitter account](#),¹¹ and via sector press. Whilst it is difficult to establish an exact figure on the size of the independent audio production sector, in 2018 it was estimated that 150 companies are based in the UK¹². Sector insight from Audio UK suggests that this figure could now be over 200 companies, in part due to the Fund encouraging new entrants to the sector. **The Fund has awarded grants to 91 companies, which would represent approaching two thirds (63%) of the sector,** highlighting strong reach across the three years of the programme. The profile of the Fund has also been supported through proactive networking by the Managing Director, members of the independent panel and by word of mouth by grant recipients.

Overview of Funding Awards

The Fund received 492 applications across the three years of delivery, of which 165 were successful (34% success rate). Of the applications that were not awarded funding, a proportion of these (41 applications) were due to bids being ineligible for funding rather than the application being unsuccessful. On average, successful applicants secured two grant funded projects over the three-year period, although one organisation secured 9 grants. A total of 91 unique organisations received grant funding across the 165 successful bids.

¹¹ The @AudioFund twitter account has posted 802 tweets since it was launched in October 2018. The twitter handle has 2,332 followers and regularly posts information about funding rounds and funding awards, including via the annual reports.

¹² Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (2018)- 'Contestable Fund Pilot: Supporting Young Audiences and Audio Content. 19th October 2018.

Overall, £3,351,924 was awarded across the three years of the fund (see Table 4.1 below). This does not include the administrative costs for running the fund which provides the balance of the total £3.7 million. The distributed funds of £3.351m is higher than the £3 million investment originally announced by DCMS. This is due to the introduction of additional investment to cover two additional themed rounds, namely [Winter Loneliness](#) and [Supporting Audiences During Coronavirus](#). The value of grants awarded ranged from between £4,951 and £61,600, with an average grant award of £36,834.

Table 4.1: Profile of grant funding investment across the fund

		No. of grants	Grant value
Year 1		25	£657,648
	Round 1	9	£235,109
	Round 2	8	£199,397
	Round 3	8	£223,142
Year 2		90	£1,702,684
	Round 4	9	£206,718
	Round 5	15	£400,449
	Round 6	19	£405,116
	Winter Loneliness	19	£292,250
	Coronavirus	28	£398,151
Year 3		50	£991,592
	Round 7	13	£272,417
	Round 8	17	£334,174
	Round 9	20	£385,001
		165	£3,351,924

Source: ACF grant monitoring data

The most prevalent genres covered across the grants awarded were factual content (68/41%), discussion/magazine content (18/11%), drama (14/8%), documentary (12/7%) and children's (12/7%). What the monitoring data highlights is the range of different genres evident across the successful grant applications,¹³ which has contributed to the diversity of the content produced. This has ensured that **the Fund has had wide appeal to a range of audiences and communities, including those historically under-represented within public service broadcasting.**

¹³ Genres included: Arts; Childrens; Comedy; Current Affairs; Discussion/Magazine; Documentary; Drama; Factual.
Live Music; Music; News and Sport.

The Fund's assessment process gave merit to productions that promoted diversity both on and off air, and projects which tackle under-representation, including gender, disability, age, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. This was not mandatory criteria for applicants and as such not all projects provided detail of how diversity was promoted in their broadcast, including content themes or diversity within production teams.¹⁴ Where provided, over half (55%) had a focus on black and minority ethnic communities, around a quarter (23%) on LGBTQ+ communities, one in five (19%) on disability and one project (three percent) on elderly groups.

Merit was also provided to productions that were able to introduce fresh voices and that enabled smaller content producers to compete in the audio and broadcasting landscape. Again, this was not a mandatory criterion. Around a third (48/29%) of projects had a focus on supporting new voices.

Projects working with community radio stations (26/54%) were more likely to focus on new voices compared with those working with a commercial radio station (20/42%).¹⁵ A broadly equal proportion of projects were delivered as long form (85 projects/52%) and short form (78 projects/47%), with two projects (one percent) incorporating both.¹⁶

The 165 funded projects have provided 735 hours of innovative and original public service broadcasts. The total duration of projects has ranged from 15 minutes to 64 hours. The Fund supported a lot of very short-form content (e.g. one-minute packages) which was an effective way of reaching audiences on music-intensive commercial radio stations. The median cost per listener hour across the Fund was £0.43, albeit as outlined later in our report this is likely to be considerably lower given the extended reach of many projects beyond the monitoring report submitted by grant recipients. In addition, direct comparison with BBC services is problematic as an average cost per listener hour for a commercial radio station's entire output would be skewed by the lower costs of playing music, as opposed to speech-heavy content common to BBC output.

Motivations Behind Applying for Funding

The motivations behind applying for funding mainly centred around the opportunity to produce an original and innovative public service broadcast (85% of survey respondents) and the fact that applications felt that they would not have been able to produce their broadcast without external funding (see Figure 4.1 over page).

The opportunity to promote diversity and produce a broadcast that tackles under-representation (59% of survey respondents) was also a strong motivating factor for applicants.

¹⁴ Primary diversity focus was allocated for 31 (19%) of the 165 funded projects.

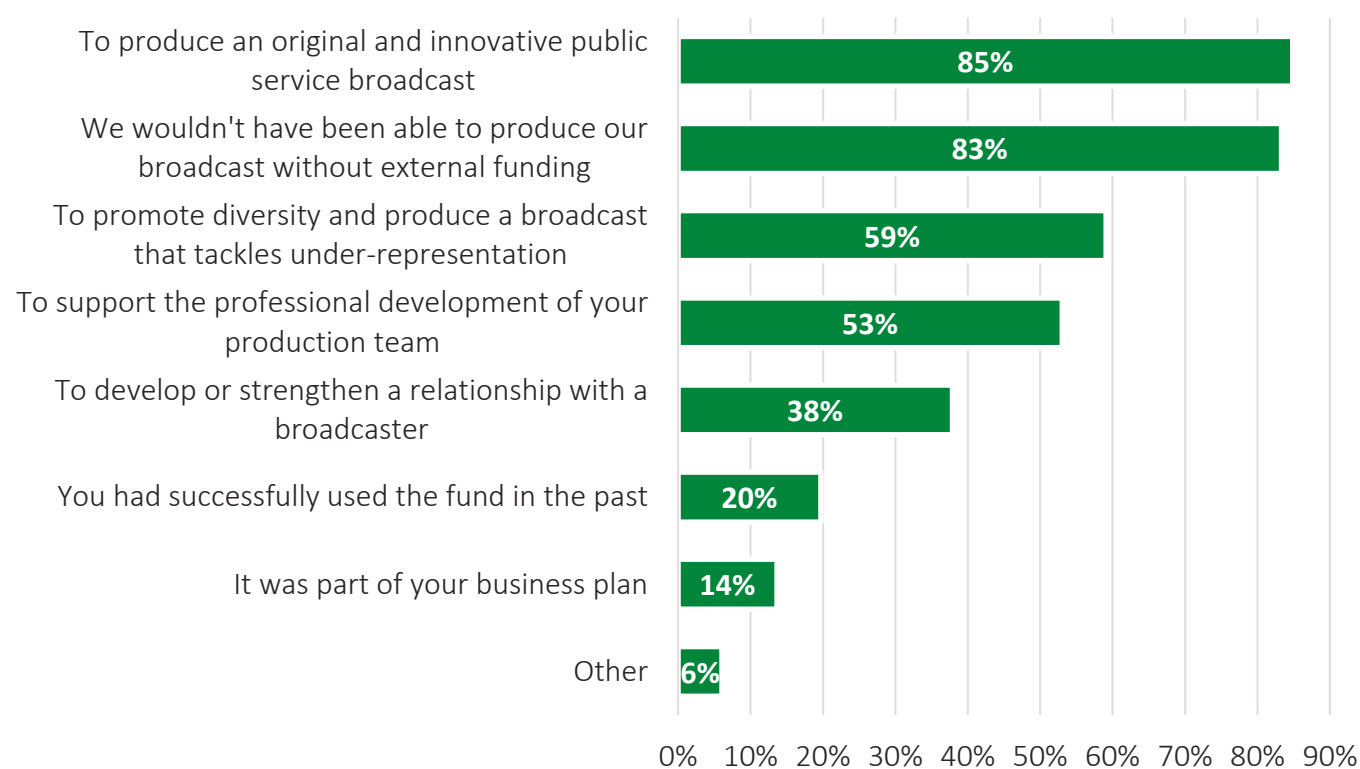
¹⁵ A further two projects (4%) worked with both commercial and community radio stations.

¹⁶ For the Audio Content Fund, short form relates to episodes of 15 minutes or shorter.

"[I was motivated by] being able to make stuff that I like and am passionate about and making stories that aren't being told." (Grant recipient)

Interestingly 53% of survey respondents stated that they were motivated to apply to the Fund to support the professional development of their company's production team. This suggests that the Fund has provided workforce development benefits for independent audio production companies, which in turn can help to expand the capacity of the sector in producing original, innovative and inclusive public service broadcasts

Figure 4.1: Motivating factors behind grant applications



Source: Wavehill survey of ACF grant recipients; N=66

Several audio production companies stated that the restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, including the temporary closure of entertainment and performance venues, motivated them to create content that could engage and support audiences via radio, in particular for communities under-represented and underserved by the BBC. Other companies were motivated by a desire to promote and celebrate multiculturalism across the UK, producing content that could help to foster mutual respect and understanding within communities.

"We should be making content for people from different backgrounds. Reaching out to communities and people who are often left on the cusp of mainstream broadcasting". (Grant recipient)

"There are a lot of amazing stories from all over the world that people don't know, I wanted to find a way to get those stories out there and promote different cultures as well. Britain is a multi-cultural place, but we don't actually know that much about creating stories." (Grant recipient)

For the majority (89%) of grant recipients, their production was solely funded by the Audio Content Fund. For the remainder (11%) the main other sources of funding included Arts Council England, Creative Scotland, National Lottery Community Fund or Trusts and Foundations.

This is consistent with feedback from sector bodies and members of the independent panel that made decisions on funding awards, who highlighted that the Fund was the only source of funding available outside of commissions by the BBC. As such, **this points to the Fund delivering strong additionality, with the public service content produced unlikely to have been created in the absence of the Fund.**

The eligibility criteria stipulated that bids should come from production companies that are registered with Companies House. As such, freelancers were unable to secure funding awards through the Fund. One of the implications of this is that several production companies were established specifically to enable them to access the grant funding opportunity.

Analysis of the grant recipient's year of incorporation for their production company reveals that around one in five (34/21%) were incorporated between 2019 and 2021. This provides evidence of **the contribution that the Fund has made to supporting growth and development for younger production companies (those incorporated within the last three years)**, one of the target impacts outlined in the Fund's Theory of Change. This analysis also reveals that the Fund has supported both new entrants to the sector along with well-established independent audio production companies (42% of grant recipients were incorporated before 2012).

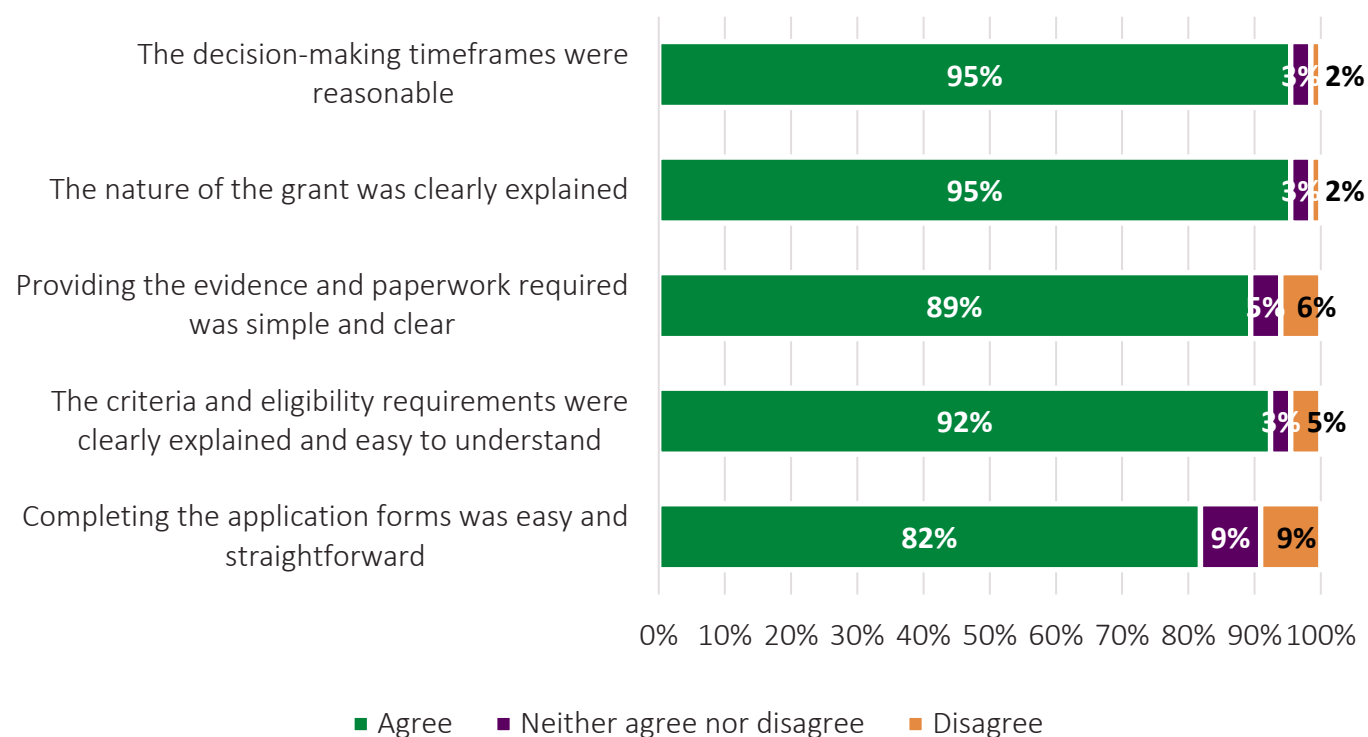
Application and Assessment Process

We asked grant applicants to rate the application and assessment process for the fund (see Figure 4.2 over page). For successful applicants, responses were positive with high levels of agreement that the decision-making timeframes were reasonable (95% agreement), that the nature of the grant was clearly explained (95% agreement) and that the criteria and eligibility criteria requirements were clearly explained and easy to understand (92% agreement). Only a small proportion of successful applicants disagreed with aspects of the application and assessment process, with the main area of disagreement around the statement that completing the application forms was easy and straightforward (nine percent of successful grant recipients disagreed).

Unsuccessful applications provided a more mixed response, with the key area of disagreement relating to the ease of completing the application forms, with around half (45%) disagreeing. The main area of criticism from unsuccessful applicants related to the clarity of feedback on their application, with just over half (55%) disagreeing that this aspect was clear. This is likely to have dissuaded some companies from reapplying.

It is worth noting that even in the cohort of unsuccessful applicants, ratings towards the process of providing evidence and paperwork (73% agreement) and decision-making timeframes (64% agreement) were positive, suggesting a robust application and assessment process.

Figure 4.2: Grant recipient's rating of the application and assessment process



Source: Wavehill survey of ACF grant recipients 2022

When asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the overall process of applying for an ACF grant, nearly all grant recipients were positive, with 76% reporting to be very satisfied and 21% satisfied. Whilst very few grant funding application and assessment processes secure full agreement from applicants (regardless of outcome), what is evident from the profile of grants awarded is that many independent audio production companies have applied multiple times. Where organisations have submitted an unsuccessful bid, this has not deterred them from submitting bids in subsequent rounds. This evidences general satisfaction with the application and assessment process and transparent way in which decisions on which bids to fund are made.

Successful applicants specifically referenced the supportive role of the ACF Managing Director in providing pre-application guidance, requesting any necessary clarifications prior to bids being considered by the independent panel and giving constructive feedback for unsuccessful bids. This included helping some organisations connect with broadcast partners (to secure the required broadcaster commitment), a process that has seen some funded projects secure air time with multiple broadcasters (see case study [Supporting the wellbeing of the nation](#) for example). This has been a key factor in encouraging organisations to submit bids across the three years of the fund, as evident in the programme being over-subscribed throughout. The design of any similar funds in the future should review the capacity needs of managing the programme based on a projected number of rounds and applications but also the potential to facilitate more networking events across independent audio producers and establishing links with prospective investors such as Government Departments and Trusts and Foundations.

Decision Making Panel

The process of deciding which bids to fund was managed by an independent panel of industry representatives. Panel members were selected to ensure that the decision-making process was informed by experts with experience across the broadcast and independent audio-production sector but also covering expertise in commissioning public service content and promoting and championing diverse voices. Panel members were originally recruited on the basis of offering their time for free, with expenses covered to a fixed amount for each round to cover the costs of travelling to London for panel meetings. This expenses budget was retained even though meetings were held virtually due to the pandemic. The Managing Director supported the panel, with both having access to a group of advisors to advise them on specialist topics, including nations and regions, indigenous languages, and community radio.

Once each bidding round was closed, the assessment period ran for around eight weeks, with bids assessed against the criteria defined by DCMS. An initial sift of applications was undertaken by the Fund's Managing Director to ensure eligibility and basic compliance prior to providing the bids for consideration by the panel. At this stage, clarifications were sought from bidders where required to ensure that the panel had all the information required to review and consider the respective merits of each application. This element of the process was welcomed by grant applicants.

The panel's role was to review, consider, discuss and decide which bids to award funding to. Panel members recognised and appreciated the work of the Managing Director in preparing the papers in advance of the meetings. As the programme was oversubscribed for every round of funding, the panel worked hard to review the papers in advance of each meeting to ensure each member was able to discuss the respective merits of each application. Individual panel members scored the applications for each round in advance of the panel meeting, where the group discussed each application in turn.

This has exerted pressure on panel members who have invested considerable capacity to support the delivery of the Fund. This commitment has ensured that the decision-making process has been considered, balanced and thorough. It has also meant that the Fund was able to run with low overheads because of the overstretched resource of the panel members and Managing Director. The design of any similar future funds should take this into account when looking at the operating resources required to administer funding.

Panel members praised the skill of the Chair in facilitating discussion and ensuring that the differing perspectives of all panel members were considered. This resulted in a consensus for each round as to which bids to award funding to. These discussions also allowed the Managing Director to provide constructive feedback, and encouragement, to unsuccessful applicants, which in turn has helped to strengthen future submissions for subsequent rounds.

The one area that some panel members felt could be strengthened in any similar future funds, was to provide the sector with common themes across bids that were unsuccessful, to help inform and improve the quality of bids received in subsequent rounds.



5. Impact of the Fund

This section of the report draws on feedback from grant recipients and broadcasters on the impact of the fund. This is used to assess the progress of the fund in achieving its intended outcomes and impacts.

Summary

- Funding has enabled grant recipients to develop new diverse and innovative public service content that they would not have been able to create otherwise.
- Around one in five projects had a primary diversity focus and approaching a third of projects have involved new voices.
- Across the three years of the fund's delivery, 71% of the projects were awarded to suppliers outside of London.
- Feedback points to longer-term, legacy impacts with individual companies using the funds to help develop relationships with commercial commissioning partners.
- Just under half (44%) of grant recipients reported that the use of the funds has enabled them to create new jobs.
- The Fund has secured a broadcast commitment from 350 radio stations and has achieved a combined reach of 57.7 million across the 165 projects.
- Around a third (32%) of grant recipients have reused or repurposed the content following the completion of their grant, extending its reach further.
- The Fund has encouraged around one in five broadcast partners to recommission further public service content.
- Around two thirds (68%) of grant recipients report that the funding has opened opportunities for them in producing additional public service broadcast content.
- Two thirds (68%) of grant recipients agree that their ACF project has supported them in improving their financial position.
- Around half (47%) of grant recipients stated that they expected to increase the volume of public service content that they create over the next five years.
- Impact reports submitted by grant recipients present compelling evidence of the difference that the content has made to individuals and communities.
- Delivery of the Fund has provided a proof of concept on the contribution that independent audio producers and the independent radio sector can make to responding swiftly and creatively to key issues facing society.

The Audio Content Fund aimed to provide support to enable independent audio production companies to create original public service content that is traditionally more difficult to produce on a commercial basis. In doing this, the Fund aimed to help grant recipients to develop partnerships with community and commercial radio stations, which in turn could open a new market to support the growth of the independent audio production sector. The Fund also aimed to achieve greater diversity and representation both on and off air and deliver social benefit for listeners, in particular those traditionally underserved within the radio sector.

Quality

One of the mandatory criteria for the Fund was that productions must be of broadcast standard, meeting the high-quality purposes and characteristics that are expected from public service content. Whilst the Fund has not had a role in quality assuring the content produced, mainly due to the lack of capacity of either the Managing Director or members of the independent panel, this has been built into the application and assessment process. The requirement of projects to be Ofcom compliant has also ensured that they have met the minimum legal quality standard outlined in the [Broadcasting Code](#). The process of reviewing the applications has considered the track record of those submitting the bid and their own quality processes. The breadth of experience and technical knowledge of panel members has ensured that any concerns around quality have informed their decision making around which bids were approved.

A further stage of quality assurance is built into the process by broadcast partners who have final sign-off on the content prior to it being aired. Given the importance of broadcast partners ensuring that they protect their own brand, this, along with the experience of the grant recipient's production staff, has ensured that all projects have achieved a high-quality level. This is evident in the responses provided by broadcast partners and other contributors in the impact reports submitted by grant recipients. **Many projects have also secured wider recognition and awards**, including for example [Coming in From the Cold](#)¹⁷ which won a Gold and Silver at the Audio & Radio Industry Awards and a Bronze at the British Sports Journalism Awards.

¹⁷ Coming In From The Cold was a documentary series produced by Unedited and broadcast by talkSPORT that looked at the history of black footballers in the English game, spanning two centuries of injustice and accomplishment.

Additionality

The gradual loosening of regulations governing commercial radio stations over recent years means that there are no longer any targets around the proportion of air time given over to speech content. The guidelines on localness on commercial radio published by Ofcom¹⁸ requires commercial radio stations to provide local news. Whilst this falls within the definition of public service content,¹⁹ it does not enable the breadth of content that is likely to support stronger social benefits for individuals and communities. Whilst the community radio sector has differing obligations based on the expectations outlined in the [Communications Act 2003](#) and the subsequent [2004 Community Radio Order](#), namely around the requirement to deliver social gain, the sector has less resources to invest in original public service content.

Feedback from both commercial and community radio stations has emphasised that the content produced through the grant funding would have been difficult to produce without Audio Content Fund investment. Eighty-five percent of grant recipients indicated that the funding has enabled them to develop new public service content that they would not have been able to create otherwise. The funding has also supported the production of genres including comedy, documentaries and drama that have previously been dominated by the BBC and in decline in commercial radio broadcasts. This demonstrates the clear additionality that has been achieved through the administration of the Fund.

Audience Reach

The expectations for funded projects were for them to deliver significant audience reach through prominent scheduling on national, regional, local and small commercial and community stations. **The Fund has secured a broadcast commitment from 350 radio stations and has recorded a gross total of 57.7 million listeners²⁰ across the 165 projects**, with 95% of this reach attributed to commercial stations, three percent from community stations and two percent from projects working with both. Commercial stations recorded an average reach of 554,537 (with one project, [Mental Health Minutes/60 Second](#) support recording reach of 4.5 million), community stations 29,870 and projects that worked with both 144,357.²¹

In the view of our research team this falls within the definition of significant audience reach. The true reach of the Fund, across the diverse range of projects, is likely to be far greater given that **around a third (32%) of grant recipients report to have reused or repurposed the content following the completion of their grant** (e.g. podcasts or repeat broadcasts).

¹⁸ Ofcom (2021) – ‘Localness on commercial radio: Amendments to guidelines and approved areas, and further consultation on approved areas in Scotland and Wales’.

¹⁹ Consultations with grant recipients revealed differing views as to how public service content was defined.

²⁰ Gross figure does not de-duplicate listeners who heard more than one project across the three years.

²¹ Commercial Radio reach figures is derived from RAJAR. Community Radio reach figures is estimated based on seven percent of Measured Coverage Area, unless they have accredited audience research that indicates otherwise.

“The five productions were located in five different UK cities outside London and also engaged various diaspora communities from outside the UK. The project therefore engaged the local UK communities as well as the diasporas.” (Grant recipient)

“The 10 community FM stations continue to broadcast both children's series and our adult-targeted series for Times Radio currently in production is also available to 16 Community FM stations around the UK.” (Grant recipient)

"The campaign helped the Wes and Gemma's show achieve its highest ever digital weekly reach and hours across the Hits Radio Network in England. The **Hit The Streets** music mix featured three times in the top five weekly downloaded content across the Hits Radio app and Audio On Demand.” (Hits Radio Network)

“The podcast element allows more listeners to access the content and sharing on social media targets the people who would otherwise not have heard of the content.” (Grant recipient)

Plurality of Public Service Content

In the context of the Fund, plurality refers to an increase in public service content aired by broadcast partners. Prior to the launch of the fund in 2019, examples of public service content on commercial radio outside of news and sport, travel, weather, charity appeals, and local events were rare, with most public service programming provided by the BBC. The 165 funded projects have provided 735 hours of innovative and original public service broadcasts.

Content produced through the fund has been broadcast on more than 350 different radio stations, a figure that is growing as some of the content has been re-purposed and re-aired beyond grant recipients' submission of their monitoring return. Projects have covered different genres, providing a rich and diverse catalogue of content.²² Feedback from panel members indicates that the programme has exceeded expectations and has achieved the objective to increase public service content aired by broadcast partners. **The Fund has also encouraged around one in five broadcast partners to recommission further public service content.** As such, it has contributed to additional content over and above that directly funded through grant awards.

" I think having funds like this will absolutely help it, having subsidised opportunities like that for people to experiment and to create things more independently will improve the quality of the productions." (Grant recipient)

²² An overview of the content produced is available on the [ACF website](#).

Innovation and Experimentation

The assessment process for applications provided merit to projects that were able to introduce new ideas and innovative approaches to public service output and to programming in general. The independent panel has considered this in the process of awarding the funding.

What the funding has enabled is for independent audio producers and broadcast partners to pursue a range of ideas and approaches that would have been difficult to secure funding for otherwise. It has provided space for concepts and ideas to be nurtured and developed, drawing on a range of contemporary issues and themes for inspiration.

Feedback from consultations with grant recipients and broadcast partners has emphasised that **this has resulted in public service content that has pushed the boundaries for broadcast partners whilst also allowing independent audio producers to develop new concepts and collaborations to engage, inspire, educate and move listeners**. Many of the broadcasts have tested new ways of working, including innovative methods of capturing and telling stories, of getting under the skin of communities and providing a platform to hidden voices. Independent audio producers report to have worked in new ways and developed their creative practice, often as part of a collaboration with Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCSFE) organisations that have helped to shape and produce the content.

Story Explorers, for example, which ran as a daily radio series by children about the stories they love was produced in partnership with the [National Literacy Trust](#) and featured children interviewing well-known children's authors. **Fighting with Pride**, which was broadcast by 10 community radio stations, told the story of those who epitomised the senseless ban on LGBT+ personnel serving in the Armed Forces and those arrested, interrogated, subjected to degrading medical examinations or courts martial. This broadcast was inspired by the work of the registered charity of the same name, '[Fighting with Pride](#)'.

“Our project was driven by the needs of the audience during the pandemic, which is all about what radio is best for, namely communicating with listeners and bringing people together, and being a trusted source of information and entertainment. We wanted to reflect what people were doing at the time and deal with the isolation that the audience were feeling. It was a very odd time for people to be locked down and stuck in their own houses, we knew radio could be a potential source of comfort for that.” (Grant recipient)

“It allowed us to innovate and generate new public service content... the budgets allowed us to be ambitious and this was welcomed by new commissioning contacts.” (Grant recipient)

Diversity and New Voices

The assessment process also provided merit to productions that promoted diversity both on and off air, and projects which tackle under-representation, including gender, disability, age, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. **Around one in five projects had a primary diversity focus**²³ and approaching a third of projects have involved new voices.²⁴ Collectively these have addressed sensitive issues around prejudice and discrimination, covered subjects around intersectionality, provided a voice to seldom or unheard voices and offered a platform to explore difference. They have also engaged and involved new voices in the process of producing and broadcasting the content.

Kick Off: Added Time, produced by Unedited, was a football phone-in which has a strong commitment to showcasing diverse new talent and under-represented audiences. The project led to a change of presenter line-up at talkSPORT, with a range of minority ethnic presenters joining the station's presenting roster.

The Rainbow Road to Tokyo, produced by Made in Manchester for Gaydio, told the stories of young LGBT athletes preparing for the Olympic and Paralympic Games.



"It enabled the station to achieve a first in embracing and showcasing LGBTQI sports personalities." (Rainbow Road to Tokyo)

"We worked with a visually impaired Access Associate to ensure the episodes used accessible language and would be appropriate for VI and SEN children." (Audiomoves)

"It gave [listeners] a great awareness of how people with disabilities were coping with the pandemic and life during lockdown." (Unheard Voices)

"We deployed some of the budget on volunteer researchers and producers, many of them young, who would not normally get a chance to work with experienced audio creatives." (Companions)

Much of this content has ongoing value and relevance to society, highlighting a potential for further repurposing to educate, inform and inspire communities across the UK.

²³ Includes 31 projects from 165 funded with a stated primary diversity focus.

²⁴ Includes 48 projects from 165 funded stating to have involved new voices.

Nations and Regions

The final assessment criterion related to merit being given to productions that were representative of the nations and regions, both on and off air, and which improve the provision of content which reflects the cultural identity of the UK's nations and regions. This was assessed through consideration of the location of the supplier, the subject matter of the content, and the perspectives and locations of its contributors. **Across the three years of the fund's delivery, 71% (117/165) of the projects were awarded to suppliers outside of London.**

A total of seven percent of the fund's grant budget has been spent on content in non-English UK Indigenous languages. **On The Land / Ar Y Tir** produced by Sblash, for Radio Carmarthenshire and Radio Pembrokeshire, was a series of short feature packages highlighted the people, groups and enterprises at the centre of rural communities in West Wales. **The Adventures of Captain Bobo**, produced by Belle Media for Fun Kids and 13 community stations, was a series of fun, nautical, team-building stories for children aged four to eight, told in English and Gaelic.

The 1920's: A new Audio history for the centenary of Northern Ireland, produced by The Foghorn Company for Drive 105, fUse FM and Radio Failte, was a landmark domestic history series in the Irish, Ulster Scots and English languages.

Across the Years one and two of the Fund six percent of the grant budget was spent on English-language content broadcast on local stations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In Year three, 13% of the grant budget was spent on bilingual content produced in English and at least one other UK Indigenous language. For the projects broadcasting on national stations, commitments were widely made to ensure contributors were from a wide range of backgrounds, representative of the whole UK.

Feedback from broadcasters and listeners has highlighted the positive impact that this focus has delivered in being representative of the nations and regions of the UK.

"K107 FM have subsequently added the Gaelic version to their 'listen again' service and are in discussion with Fife Council to see what more they can do to serve the Gaelic speakers." (The Adventures of Captain Bobo)

"It really resonated with me and reminded me of the importance of retaining my mother tongue." (One Voice)

"We know that the listeners in North and Mid Wales, Hertfordshire and Yorkshire will have appreciated hearing the feel-good stories from their local key worker." (Heart's Hometown Heroes)

"It broadened traditional notions of history and heritage in our Ulster Scots community." (Hidden History of Place Names)

Use of Funds

The ACF funding was able to cover broadcast radio content, including at the discretion of the panel the production costs of directly related on-air promotional content. Funding could not be used for advertisement slots and non-broadcast material (such as videos, websites, social media or printed material). Funding could also not be used for the staging of events, though it was available for content created at or via events, staff development or training or “pay to play” fees as the expectation was for stations to broadcast the content free of charge.²⁵

Feedback from grant recipients (see Figure 5.1 over page) indicates that the funding has enabled them to develop new public service content that they would not have been able to create otherwise (85% of survey respondents). It has also **helped them to develop more diverse content** (79% of survey respondents) and more innovative content (74% of survey respondents).

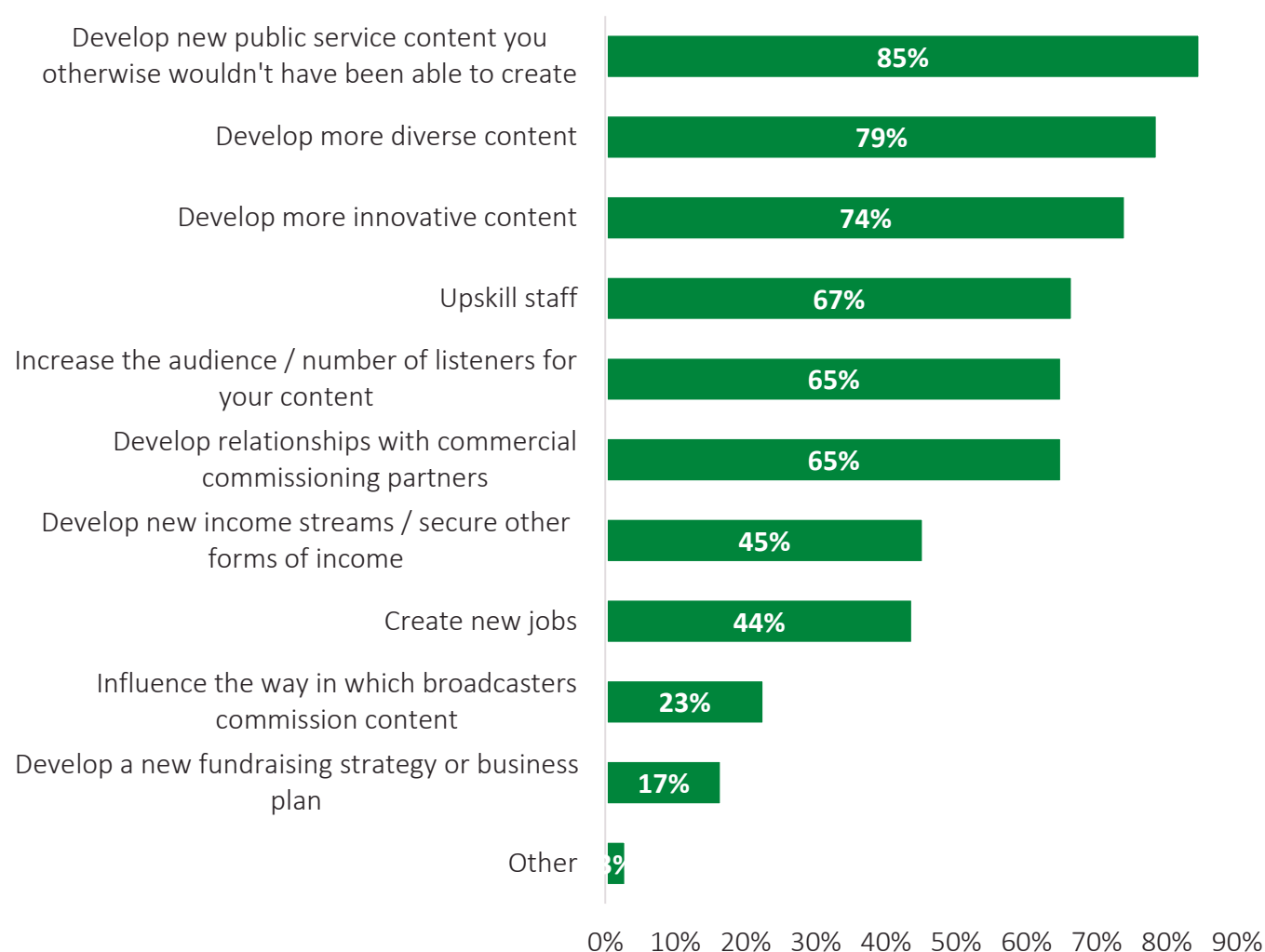
Whilst the funding could not be used specifically for staff development or training, around two thirds (67%) of grant recipients indicated that the use of the funds has enabled them to upskill staff.

Feedback also points to longer-term, legacy impacts with individual companies and the wider audio production sector using the funds to help **develop relationships with commercial commissioning partners** (65% of survey respondents) and support with **developing new income streams** (45%). Just under half (44%) of survey respondents also reported that the use of the funds has enabled them to **create new jobs** (see later section on [value for money](#) for further detail).

"Previous to the Audio Content Fund we didn't work with community radio. We've worked with the BBC on commissioning rounds probably since 2015 or 2016, that was when we first put a programme out on BBC 2 and 1 Xtra, but now we've got a regular commissioned show." (Grant recipient)

²⁵ Audio Content Fund (2021)- 'Bidding Guidelines Document- v7: April 2021'.

Figure 5.1: What the funding has enabled applicants to do



Source: Wavehill survey of ACF grant recipient 2022

Compliance with the guidelines on what the funding can be used to cover, along with feedback from grant recipients on what the funding has enabled them to do, demonstrates that the use of the funding has remained focused on the overarching objectives for the pilot set out in its Theory of Change. In recognition of evolving radio and audio listening habits,²⁶ influenced by the development of new services and the growing adoption of digital devices, one of the principal areas grant recipients felt needed to be changed in the design of any future similar funds was the ability to use funding not only for the live broadcast of the public service content produced but also for the creation of podcasts and content for on-demand services. This would help to extend the reach and use of the content created and in doing so engage a broader audience base. It would also contribute to delivering stronger value for money based on cost per listener ratios.

²⁶ Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (2022)- 'Digital radio and audio review'.

Impact on Grant Recipients

One of the key research questions around the Fund is understanding what impact the grant funding has had on companies that were successfully supported. This includes the extent to which the funding has contributed to changing their financial position and prospects as well as enabling them to create lasting new relationships with broadcast partners.

Prior to the delivery of their ACF grant nearly two thirds (61%) of companies did not have a relationship with commercial radio organisations and only around one in 10 (14%) had a funding strategy. Feedback from grant recipients has highlighted the benefits of securing grant funding enabling them to spend time developing concepts for public service broadcast content and having the funds to approach and secure commitments from broadcast partners.

“The Audio Content Fund has been a brilliant bridge between commercial radio broadcasters and independents. It has allowed us to pitch and produce content that may not have been made due to budget from the broadcaster. We know audiences want more than just back-to-back music and the fund has been a brilliant way of creating compelling programming.” (Grant recipient)



In the absence of the Fund, organisations commonly referenced having to take risks in developing content that may not be taken up by broadcasters and as such would not generate them a financial income.

“Without the funding and the clearly communicated purpose the Audio Content Fund we would not have considered or been able to develop the business in the way we have. It has been key to our subsequent success.” (Grant recipient)

The Audio Content Fund as a brand, with clear investment from DCMS, was helpful in opening doors. For companies without prior links to broadcast partners, this was regarded as a much more productive approach than cold calling. Several grant recipients acknowledged the service provided by the Local Media Association in helping to bring independent audio producers together with prospective broadcast partners. This was valuable in enabling them to secure the broadcaster commitment to air the content and for some helped to speed up the process of applying for funding.

There is positive evidence around continuing collaborations between grant recipients and their broadcast partners. **Around one in five (18%) grant recipients report to have secured a follow-up commission** because of working with the broadcaster(s), either a continuation of the programme originally funded by their grant or a separate commission.²⁷

Prison Bag produced by Falling Tree for example, secured a commission from the BBC to produce a follow-up to the series, which has also been licenced for release via podcast. Companies that have worked with both community and commercial broadcasters were the most likely to have secured a follow-on commission. Those working with community broadcasters were twice as likely to have been re-commissioned than those working with commercial broadcasters, albeit this finding should be treated with caution given the small sample sizes involved.

"We have won funding to produce two series of podcasts from local commissioners." (Grant recipient)

"I was personally commissioned to create four additional episodes of a similar nature to mark their [broadcast partners'] launch in London." (Grant recipient)

Around two thirds (68%) of grant recipients report that the funding they have received has opened opportunities for them in producing additional public service broadcast content. Many are using their Audio Content Fund project as a calling card to showcase to broadcast partners (commercial, community and the BBC) the quality of their work.

"The funding supported our business at a pivotal early stage, helping us establish ourselves with clients as a credible production company capable of delivering high quality content for multiple platforms." (Grant recipient)

"Although the team has relevant past experience, it was only as a result of the Audio Content Fund support that our company is now recognised and established as high quality producer of innovative radio content. We were able to approach different national broadcasters and present them with original programme ideas together with a potential funding package attached to the project. In our view we would simply not have been able to get our creative content on a broadcasting platform without the support of the Audio Content Fund." (Grant recipient)

Four in 10 (39%) of grant recipients indicated that the delivery of their ACF grant funding project had assisted them in securing additional work elsewhere. This has included off-radio projects such as collaborations with higher education institutions and with Amazon, Spotify and audiobooks.

²⁷ This is a similar proportion to the 20% of grant recipients responding to the in-house survey conducted in 2021 who indicated that they had secured a follow-on commission(s) as a result of working with their broadcast partner.

Grant recipients also highlighted the potential for content produced through their ACF grant to be taken to other mediums including television and theatre. This suggests that the programme may act as a catalyst for other sectors to showcase and better represent the diversity of voices and communities across the UK. One of the learning points from the design of the Fund has been the value of the intellectual property being retained by independent audio producers and, where required, their broadcast partners. This has provided them with freedom to explore opportunities to repurpose the content beyond the completion of their ACF grant.

“We are also planning to use some of the content on our podcast channel. Fun Kids continue to run the series on their Story Quest platform. We also repurposed one of our children's radio programmes to produce an illustrated author event for the Scottish Libraries Association Summer Reading initiative 2021. Both children's radio series are also now available on the Cloudaloud Audiobook Platform. Finally, we have produced CDs of the Gaelic version of our Captain Bobo children's radio series for use mainly in Gaelic primary schools - the CD is also stocked by the Gaelic Books Council.” (Grant recipient)

“Being involved in two ACF productions has given me credibility as a small, independent production company and helped to establish strong working relationships with BBC commissioners, podcast platforms and commercial radio editors. My business plan and aim are to continue my documentary-making journey and create new income streams to enable me to produce audio projects that focus on history and heritage.” (Grant recipient)

Delivery of their funded project has provided organisations with skills in developing bids, making a case for investment, understanding how to pitch their concepts and turning their creative ideas into public service content. This has been invaluable for many grant recipients, including smaller and younger companies with less trading experience.

“It's strengthened contacts with the community radio sector, it's expanded the regional base of professionals that I might work with including actors, directors, sound designers and writers and strengthened connections with all the people who were involved in making it.” (Grant recipient)

“[I] learned how to pitch and develop programme ideas...and on a technical level, it was a platform to retrain and improve my skills.” (Grant recipient)

Two thirds (68%) of grant recipients agreed that their ACF project has supported them in improving their financial position.

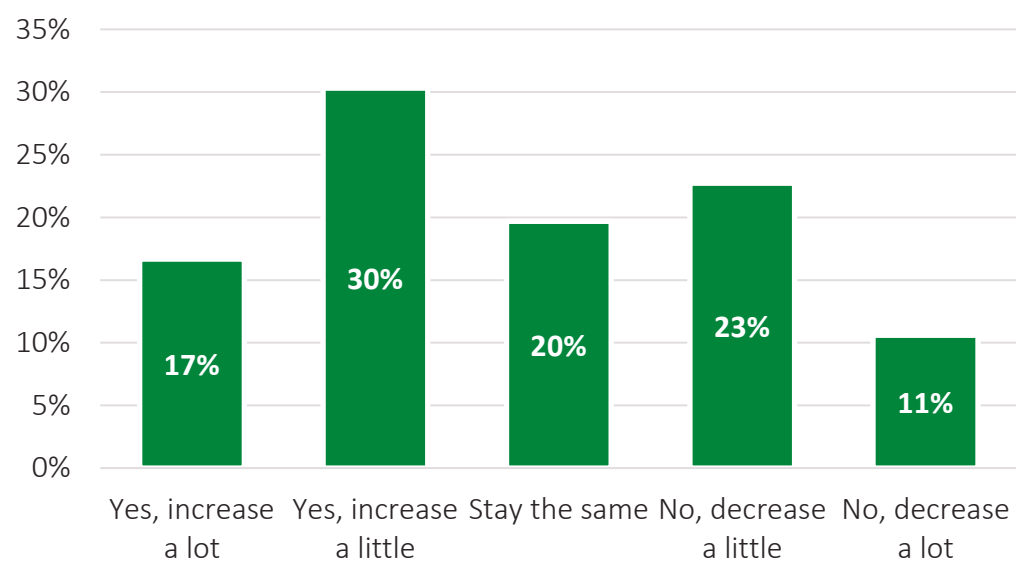
“I can't explain how important ACF has been to me personally. It has been phenomenal not only for my career but helping me pay my bills, a massive contributing factor in saving my career and surviving through the pandemic.” (Grant recipient)

“The fund enabled proof of concept and has created a whole new path for my production company as well as for many of the people who worked on the project.” (Grant recipient)

The process of developing their public service broadcast has also provided opportunities for independent audio producers to develop links with VCFSE organisations. For many, this has provided them with potential future collaborators to support the development of further content which shines a light on communities or issues that have traditionally been underrepresented within the BBC and independent radio sector.

A total of 70% (46 companies) of grant recipients report to be confident that their production company will continue to produce innovative public service broadcasting over the next five years, indicating potential for the Fund to delivery longer-term benefits in terms of the diversity and range of public service content aired by the independent radio sector. **Around half (47%) of grant recipients stated that they expected to increase the volume of public service content that they create over the next five years** (Figure 5.2)

Figure 5.2: Grant recipient perspectives on future PSB production over next five years



Source: Wavehill survey of grant recipients 2022

Although one third (34%) expected their content levels to decrease, this was strongly influenced by uncertainty around what funding may be available beyond the Fund as opposed to a lack of interest in continuing to create public service content. Responses highlight a desire from grant recipients to share practice and ideas around securing funding to continue this strand of work beyond the close of the programme.

Independent audio content companies report that the experience of delivering their grant funded project has provided them with new ideas and opportunities to develop different income streams. This can aid the sector to develop greater resilience through income diversification and provide future capacity to collaborate with broadcaster to develop and air innovative and creative public service content.

Impact of Broadcast Partners

One of the key impacts reported by commercial and community broadcast partners has been the value of the Fund in enabling them to air quality public service content. The Fund has introduced them to independent audio providers, enabled them to collaborate in the development of the projects and broadcast innovative speech-based content to inspire, engage, support and inform their listenership.

"The content is quite relevant to a certain demographic, and made our audience realise they can trust us to broadcast more quality stuff that's relevant to them." (Broadcast partner)

"The programme was planned, produced and edited to a very high standard, bringing quality content to the Absolute network." (Songs From Amy's Jukebox)

"The daily 'Essential Voices' feature has been a pivotal part of this allowing us to broadcast uplifting, positive and heart-warming stories in a way that simply would not have been possible without the support of the Audio Content Fund." (Essential Voices)

"Without the funding we could not have proceeded with our idea. We have been able to establish a relationship with a commercial network which helped us shape the idea in a more imaginative way and one which would appeal to their audience." (Grant recipient)

Broadcasters highlighted the value of the Fund in encouraging them to take creative risks and cover genres and issues that they would have been unlikely to commit to air otherwise.

"I think it gave us a really well-resourced production that we wouldn't have been able to produce in house unless it had been funded elsewhere." (Broadcast partner)

"Working with external producers and sharing ideas and airtime is something we will look to do more in the future." (Broadcast partner)

Following the launch of the programme, many broadcasters referenced the quality associated with the ACF content, which in turn encouraged them to explore further collaborations with independent audio producers. Having the ability to shape the content, both prior to applying to the Fund and following award, ensured that the final output was aligned to individual station's brand.

“Scheduling has been more diverse without a doubt. It's allowed us to look beyond our own four walls and get presenters we might not be able to afford.” (Broadcast partner)

“Being part of the programme making process I got to understand the skills needed to create these story programmes. Then we employed a producer to do this kind of thing for us. It's enabled us to then create documentaries, commissioned from our understanding of how to make programmes like this. It's lifted us up.” (Broadcast partner)

"This was an incredibly impactful programme which perfectly encapsulated Absolute Radio's personality in terms of being warm, inclusive and positive about mental health and music's power to uplift in the darkest times." (One Year Like This)

Whilst not all broadcasters were able to quantify the extent to which the content had supported them in growing or diversifying their listener base, anecdotal feedback implied that that Fund has raised their profile within previously underserved communities.

"The stories that were being told, like we do with other podcasts and all the other content we broadcast it's the content that connects and is relevant to our audience. We normally wouldn't be able to produce something like that ourselves, the quality was great." (Broadcast partner)

"This was a KISS first, and part of our “reconnecting” strategy with a diverse UK audience. KISS is now continuing to deliver special weekends of programming forever more, so this project was an important part of solidifying this tactic into our strategy." (Carnival on KISS)

"The programme gave us record streaming on our Musicals station at that time increasing listening on that day by approximately 30%." (Magic with the Musicals)

There are numerous examples of where the Fund has had a transformative impact on individual stations, prompting them to reflect on the diversity of their respective workforce and inclusivity of their schedules. Projects such as **Kick Off: Added Time** demonstrate how the public service content created and subsequent reaction from listeners and commercial sponsors have influenced the operating models of broadcast partners. There are examples across the programme of broadcasters receiving approaches from commercial sponsors to sponsor some of the content aired or recommission independent audio producers to generate follow-up content.

Broadcasters also referenced the positive impact that their association with the Fund had delivered in terms of their respective workforce, providing opportunities for them to collaborate with audio producers and cover issues and genres not previously featured with their schedules.

"Hugely rewarding to work on too, and we thank the Fund for providing the opportunity to deliver it." (Broadcast partner)

Whilst the Fund has raised the aspirations of broadcast partners to support further quality public service broadcasts, for many the key challenge was in their lack of ability to identify resources to support this.

Whilst one in five grant recipients have been recommissioned following their collaboration with their broadcast partner, all broadcast partners engaged by our research team indicated that they would not hesitate to commit to airing future public service content using a similar model to the Fund.

"Without the funding of the Audio Content Fund, we simply wouldn't be able to create such moments of depth." (Greatest Brits - Women In Music)

This demonstrates that the programme has raised aspirations and provided proof of concept within the independent radio sector. The challenge was to build on the momentum generated over the three years of delivery by identifying continuation funding to support future creative collaborations.

Listenership and Social Benefit

Radio is seen as a highly accessible and dependable medium. Previous research²⁸ has highlighted the benefits it provides to listeners, including, but not limited to:

Personal benefits:

- A 'companion' role, bringing background noise to otherwise quiet environments;
- Helping lighten moods amidst everyday routines;
- Providing relationships with favourite presenters and personalities; and
- Allowing effortless consumption of local information.

Social benefits:

- Enabling connections with the outside world;
- Creating an ambience; and
- Encouraging discussions.

Broadcasting is a powerful medium which can change public opinion on a range of issues. It can motivate people to take action to improve their lives and the world around them. Recent research published by the Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre has outlined the public value created by public service broadcasting, including fostering national conversation and democratising access to information.

Public service broadcasting policy for creating social value is broadly organised around two interrelated principles: universality, the aim to serve the needs and interests of all audiences and open them to a range of different perspectives and accessibility, making public service broadcasting services widely available, prominently displayed and discoverable on different distribution platforms, and not limited by a person's ability to pay.

²⁸ KANTAR Media (2016)- 'Local commercial radio content'.

Public service broadcasting also has role to play in representing the diverse lifestyles and communities that make up modern society, as well as tackling systemic inequalities and exclusion facing minority groups.²⁹ It also creates civic value through empowering the public to participate in democratic processes, by informing individuals about the world around them, raising awareness of issues that affect their lives and communities, and fostering audiences' sense of their own place in public life.³⁰ The recent evaluation of the Community Radio Fund³¹ and guidance provided by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland,³² further articulate the contribution that the independent radio sector can provide in delivering social gain.

One of the challenges evident from consultations with grant recipients and broadcasters (community and commercial radio stations) is the difficulty of capturing feedback from listeners to ascertain the social and community benefits, given the relatively small amounts of funding awarded. As such, limited evidence is available over and above data on audience reach. The design of any similar funding in the future should consider providing resource within the grant funding awards to enable broadcasters to capture feedback from listeners, including those engaging with live content as well as through podcasts and streamed services.

Analysis of the impact reports submitted by grant recipients does however present compelling evidence of individual stories of the difference that the content has made to individuals and communities. The [case studies](#) provided in the appendices of our report provides further detail on this evidence base, drawing on direct feedback provided to broadcasters from listeners.

"I thought I knew and understood my community really well, but there are aspects of the LGBTQ community that I don't have a great experience of. And one of those is with non-binary people, and I've had some exposure but not anything direct." (Listener, Buddyline)

"Most national commercial stations struggle with diversity both in terms of background and ethnicity, producers and listeners but also perspectives and locations. Whilst we're all trying to improve that there's very few that still have a lot of work to be done and that being an intrinsic part of this, the couples recruited for stories on interracial relationships, all of those we were able to actively ensure it was a diverse set of voices." (Broadcast partner)

"This has helped my mental health in the climate of COVID-19, this needs to be a regular segment." (The Wellness Workout)

²⁹ Chivers, T. & S. Allan (2022)- 'What is the Public Value of Public Service Broadcasting?: Exploring challenges and opportunities in evolving media contexts'. Discussion Paper 2022/01. Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre.

³⁰ Ofcom (2020)- 'Public Service Broadcasting: omnibus survey findings'. July 2020.

³¹ Wavehill (2021)- 'Evaluation of the Community Radio Fund'.

³² Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (2020)- 'Community Radio: Delivering Social Benefit'.

"This is a fantastic short for kids, my four, six and eight 8-year-old boys have listened to the full set of five more than 10 times!! Waiting to hear the next few, we love the character-filled stories, comedy and intriguing voices." (The Old Man in the Boat)

Collectively the significant volume of public service broadcasts created through the grant funding distributed by the Audio Content Fund has helped to make this content more widely available. It has distributed this content across 350 independent radio stations and by design has represented diverse lifestyles and communities. As such, by design and delivery, the programme has created social value.

Much of the content produced remains relevant and provides a resource to engage and support future listeners. For example, projects such as [In the Beginning](#), produced by Social Broadcasts, provide a valuable learning resource to support children in understanding and respecting different religions, customs and beliefs. There is considerable merit in the content produced across the Audio Content Fund to be showcased to a range of different organisations as resources to support and engage future listeners and in doing so generate future social value and impact.

Legacy and Proof of Concept

The Audio Content Fund was launched as a pilot in 2019 as part of the broader Contestable Fund to test a model of supporting a broad range of public service audio content, on a wider range of UK radio stations. The Fund aimed to encourage greater innovation and experimentation by taking pressure off commercial and community stations and providers to seek sponsorship and advertising revenue to fund original public service content

Whilst one in five grant recipients have been recommissioned following their collaboration with their broadcast partner, it is unlikely that the volume of public service content produced through the Audio Content Fund will be continued by relying on broadcaster commissioning budgets alone. Although two thirds of grant recipients have used their funding to develop relationships with commercial commissioning partners, several broadcasters (community and commercial) referenced downward pressure on their revenue from advertising, which was squeezing their operating costs and restricting their ability to fund the production of public service content.

Although a few broadcasters have been able to attract commercial sponsorship to part fund or extend the scope of projects, this process can take considerable time and can also limit the creative freedom of independent audio producers to create content that engages and reaches underserved audiences. There is however a need to provide value for the public purse and as such the design of any similar future funds may consider requiring an element of match funding for grant applicants.

However, **delivery of the Fund has provided a proof of concept on the contribution that the independent audio producers and the independent radio sector can make to responding swiftly and creatively to key issues facing society.** Combined a total of 47 grant projects secured funding through the Winter Loneliness and Supporting Audiences During Coronavirus additional rounds. The Audio Content Fund as a programme has been able to accommodate and distribution additional investment by government departments in response to key issues.

This has considerable potential to be extended as a model in the design of any similar future funds. The independent audio production sector has shown its value in being able to produce engaging and innovative broadcasts that create social value and support individuals and communities within the listenership.

Moving forward any similar future funds could consider combining open rounds with further themed or issue-based rounds which may cover issues as diverse as living with dementia, tackling knife crime, achieving net zero or the role of young carers in society. These themed rounds may attract investment from government departments, Trusts and Foundations and organisations with an interest in representing hidden voices and shining a light on contemporary issues in modern Britain. This would help to further stimulate and sustain the market place for independent audio producers and expand the broadcast of quality public service content across the independent radio sector.

The Government has outlined a commitment to support and strengthen UK radio and has recognized the valuable role that the commercial and community radio sectors have played in supporting people through the pandemic, keeping people informed and providing companionship.³³ Further funding similar to the Audio Content Fund could help to strengthen the legacy benefits outlined in this report and achieve continuing benefits for the independent audio production sector, commercial and community radio stations and importantly the millions of listeners reached by public service broadcasts.

³³ Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (2022)- 'Up Next: The Government's vision for the broadcasting sector'.

6. Value for Money and GVA

This section of the report provides an assessment of the economic impact of the Audio Content Fund using an estimate of its Gross Value Added, jobs created and supply chain impacts.

Summary

- Following completion of their project, many grant recipients were able to diversify their income sources, improving their resilience and supporting the wider sector.
- Grant recipients have reported increases in the number of staff they employ.
- We estimate that up to 40 full time jobs and up to 200 part time jobs have been created due to the Fund.
- On average each project supported 60 freelancer days. When scaled across the total number of projects, this would equate to 9,842 freelancer days.
- Grant recipients have doubled the number of contracted freelancer days they are using following the completion of their project.
- Total GVA impacts of the Audio Content Fund grant outlay for funded projects is estimated at £2.821m. Relative to the grant amount, this equates to a return on investment of £0.84 for every £1.
- Analysis of the cost per production minute suggest the Audio Content Fund has achieved good value on the outputs produced relative to the industry.

Income Change

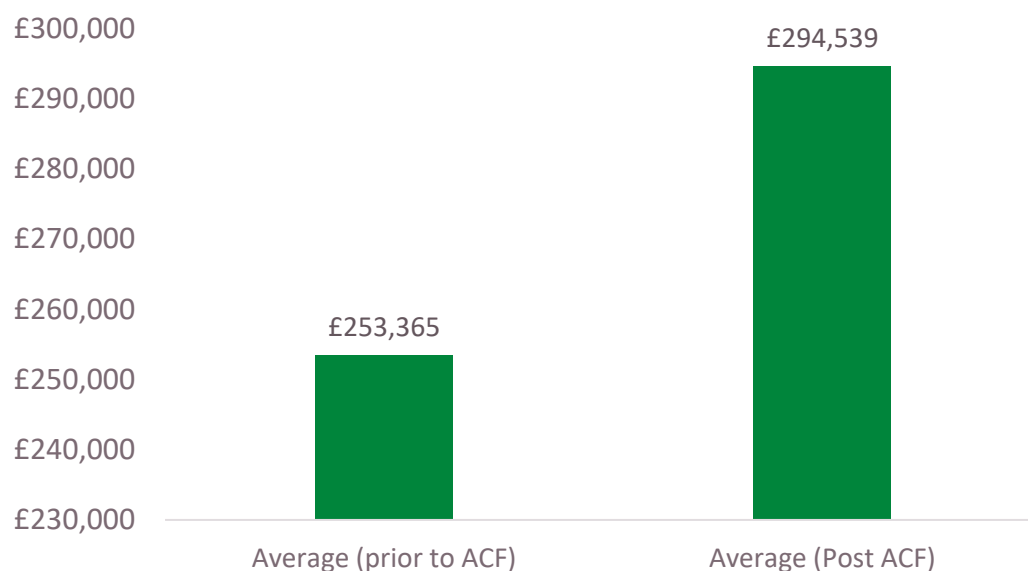
Prior to receiving their grant, companies in receipt of funding had a mean average annual income of £253,365, where the minimum was £0³⁴ and the maximum £500,000. Commercial commissions provided the largest average source of funding at 63%, with other sources of funding comprising on average 35% of income (this included direct sale of content, training and consultancy work). On average, grant funding accounted for 21% of the income generated by companies prior to receiving their grant award. Following completion of their project, there was a move away from other funding sources, including commercial commissions and towards grant funding. Though for many this is diversifying their income sources, potentially improving their resilience, there may be an increased dependence on grants.

³⁴ This is because a number of companies were formed to enable them to access grant funding and so had no prior trading history.

In the financial year after completing their Audio Content Fund project, total average income increased to £334,127. This represents an increase of 31%. Removing the value of the grant for those who applied in 2021 suggests that average income was approximately £294,538, or a 16% increase (Figure 6.1 below). Some 39% of companies reported that their income had increased since they had received their grant with 30% reporting the same income and 30% a decrease.

Where there had been an increase in income, beneficiaries attributed an average of 28.2% of this to the support from the Audio Content Fund. Among those whose turnover had stayed the same or decreased, 69.6% felt that it would have decreased by a greater amount without their grant award, mainly due to the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. On average, 26% of current turnover among this group was safeguarded by their grant award and the impacts this had.

Figure 6.1: Change in average turnover pre and post ACF grant of surveyed beneficiaries



Source: Wavehill survey of grant recipients 2022

ONS figures suggest that the programming and broadcasting activities sector turnover shrank by a 5% between 2018 and 2019 (prior to the Covid-19 pandemic). Indicators from the Media Nations: UK 2022 report³⁵ show further decline during the pandemic, though recovery of revenue in advertising and other sources of turnover in 2021 suggest the radio and audio sector has grown. The organisations that have been supported through the Audio Content Fund have experienced an average 5.8% growth between their baseline and the year after support was provided. Given this period covers a decline in the sector and the pandemic, this presents positive evidence on the **impact of the Fund in supporting grant recipients in both protecting and growing their incomes and the resultant contribution to their survivability.**

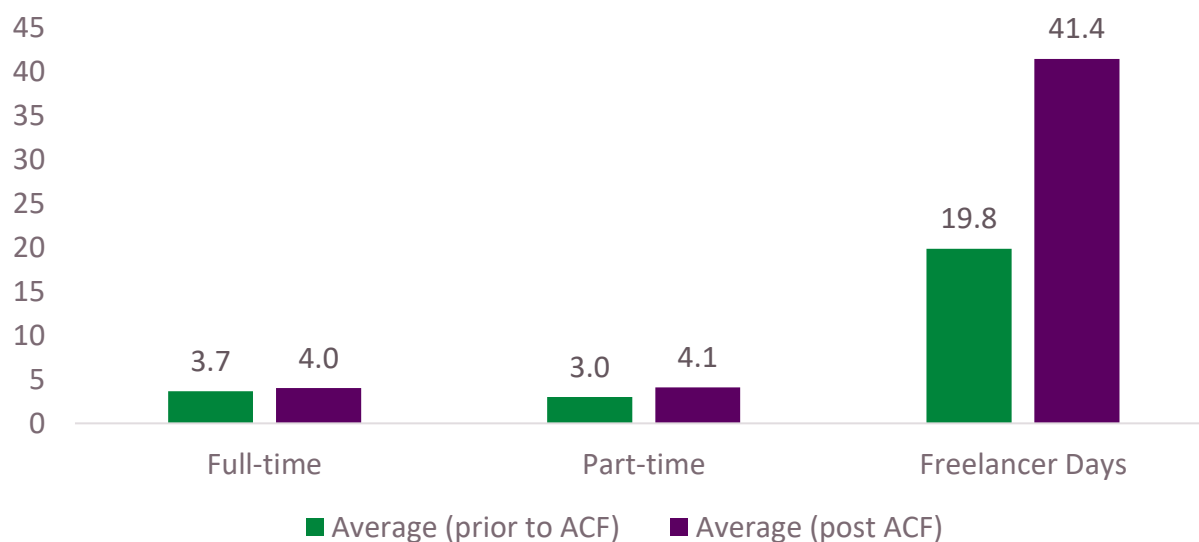
³⁵ Ofcom (2022) - 'Media nations: UK 2022.

Employment

The projects in receipt of grant funding typically supported one full time and four part time roles within for the duration of the production. On average **each project supported 60 freelancer days**, a significant portion of a year's work. When scaled across the total number of projects, this would equate to 9,842 freelancer days. This is higher than ACF's own analysis based on their 2021 in-house survey which suggests that **approximately 6,225 freelancer days have been created across the three years of funding**, equating to an average of 38 days per project.³⁶

Not only does this provide income for those in the sector, but provides valuable experience, particularly for organisations and individuals who may not have other opportunities with core actors in the market. Likely due in part to the nature of the projects and organisations receiving Audio Content Fund grants the key change in the financial year following the award of funding has been an increase in the number of freelancer days regularly used (Figure 6.2 below). On average grant recipients utilised 20 freelancer days per year to support their activities which increased to 41 days following the completion of their grant funded project. The number of part time staff employed at these organisations also grew from three to 4.1 while full time staff increased, though to a lesser extent, from 3.7 to four.

Figure 6.2: Change in employment pre and post ACF grant of surveyed beneficiaries



Source: Wavehill survey of grant recipients 2022

Sixty-one percent of organisations reported that the grant enabled them to employ more staff or draw on greater freelancer days since they received their grant. Overall, 11 additional full-time members of staff were employed because of the Audio Content Fund grant along with 90 part time roles among survey respondents.

³⁶ ACF (2022)- 'Annual Report 2021-2022'.

Assuming similar patterns of recruitment among the rest of the beneficiary population, scaling these results would suggest that **approximately 16 full time and 128 part time jobs have been created due to the Fund**. The in-house survey conducted by ACF in 2021 June 2021 suggests that the jobs created figures may be even higher, with up to 40 full time jobs and up to 200 part time jobs created across the three years of funding.³⁷

Gross Value Added

Estimating Gross Value Added (GVA) for the audio sector is particularly challenging and to date there is no insight on the contribution of this part of the broader programming and broadcasting activities sector. Drawing on ONS data from the Annual Business Survey,²⁸ turnover to GVA ratios can be gained at a 2 digit SIC level. This provides a GVA ratio of 0.53 (taking a three-year average of the latest data, 2018-2020 to account for some of the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic) for the programming and broadcasting activities. This is an assumption and may overestimate the actual GVA from grant recipient organisations who are likely to be younger companies and below the industry average. The 2 digit SIC code is also not specific to audio, so includes other subsectors including television.

Eight five percent of survey respondents suggested that the grant enabled them to create content they would otherwise not have been able to create. This accounts for 85% of the production value and it is therefore assumed that this proportion of content would not have been produced without the ACF grant. A deadweight figure of 15% is therefore applied to account for output which may not have been dependent on the Fund. Given that most of the organisations are young and creating novel content which is less likely to be displacing other production in the market, a low displacement figure of 10% is used. No leakage is assumed given the activities and benefits are assumed at a UK level.

Applying the GVA ratio above to the grant outlay for projects funded by the Audio Content Fund (with beneficiaries confirming that 89% of project funding was from the Fund) produces **a direct GVA impact from the Fund of £1.356m**. Indirect impacts on GVA are estimated based on the multiplier effects for the sector, drawing on the latest input output tables from the ONS.³⁸ These show that an additional £1.464m in GVA will be generated indirectly through the supply chain and from induced expenditure. Total GVA impacts of the Audio Content Fund grant outlay for funded projects is therefore estimated at £2.821m. **Relative to the grant amount, we have calculated this is a return on investment of £0.84 for every £1 (see Table 6.1 over page for detail).**

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ ONS (2021) - Input Output Tables.

Table 6.1: Audio Content Fund GVA calculation

	Indicator		Value	Action
Total Grant Outlay	A	£	3,351,924	
Ratio	B		0.53	
Deadweight	C		15%	
Displacement	D		10%	
Leakage	E		0%	
Direct GVA	F	£	1,356,252	$A \times B \times (100\% - C - D - E)$
Indirect Multiplier	G		0.82	
Indirect GVA	H	£	1,112,127	$F \times G$
Induced Multiplier	I		0.26	
Induced GVA	J	£	352,626	$F \times I$
Total GVA	K	£	2,821,005	$F + H + J$

This is, however, a narrow attempt to determine the GVA benefit from the Audio Content Fund. Sixty-eight percent of survey respondents suggest that they have secured further work on the back of the projects produced with their grant funding. While not all of the GVA benefits of these future projects should be attributed to the Fund, a large proportion could be. Though we do not have the data to explore what the value of these subsequent projects have been, if we were to assume they were of similar scale to the Audio Content Fund grant funded projects themselves, then several million pounds in further investment may have been made, partially because of the Fund. **This could generate approximately £2 million in additional GVA for the Audio Content Fund and push the return on investment on quantifiable markers above 1.**

There are also wider benefits for broadcast partners and listeners as have been discussed elsewhere in this report. These provide qualitative demonstration of the strong value of the Audio Content Fund and should be considered in addition to the quantified figures provided above.

Listener Hour Costs

In our [overview of funding awards](#) section of the report, we outlined that supported projects have been created at a median (to make some allowance for outliers) cost per user hour of £0.43. Some 80% of productions funded through the Fund had a cost per user hour of less than £0.50. The only data that is available for the industry is from the BBC which while comparable needs to be caveated that this does not reflect the listenership and production costs of other content. There are large differences in production costs depending on content (radio drama is typically the most expensive content to produce while music is relatively cheap) and inherent listenership is provided by mainstream radio. Further, the listener figures for some ACF content may not always be accurate, particular for those broadcasts on Community Radio which generally does not participate in RAJAR.

Around half of projects funded through ACF cost less than 10 pence per listener hour. The cost per individual user hour for mainstream BBC radio is between one and six pence.³⁹ While this is lower than the productions funded by ACF grants, this is to be expected and given the caveats suggests that the content produced from ACF grants is, on average, not hugely expensive. It also provides good development opportunities and qualitative benefits as outlined elsewhere in this report which should be considered in this premium.

To allow for some of the challenges with the cost per user hour reported, cost per production minute have been calculated for the Audio Content Fund projects and compared to tender opportunity figures for similar content being produced for BBC Radio 4. On average, BBC Radio 4 productions are around £214.88 per minute. Productions funded by grants from ACF by comparison cost £105.59 across all outputs, or a median average of £133.63 for each project. **These figures suggest the Audio Content Fund has achieved good value on the outputs produced relative to the industry norm.** However, there remain challenges with comparison to the BBC where budgets are likely higher.

³⁹ BBC (2022) - BBC Group Annual Report and Accounts 2021/22

7. Summary and Recommendations

This section of the report provides a summary on the progress that the Audio Content Fund has made to achieving its objectives. A small number of recommendations are provided to inform the design of any similar funds in the future.

Summary

The primary objective for the Audio Content Fund was to pilot a model of using grant funding to create new opportunities for independent audio producers and broadcasters to make public service broadcasting content. It was hoped that this would help to drive plurality, competition, and innovation by facilitating collaborations across both sectors, helping to expand the scale and diversity of public service content broadcast by commercial and community radio stations and to engage audiences of all ages and backgrounds. Evidence presented in this report demonstrates that the Fund has been successful in achieving its objectives across all of the eight eligibility criteria set by DCMS.

The Fund has been well promoted, achieving strong reach into the commercial and community radio sectors. It has also supported approaching two thirds of the independent audio production sector in the UK, helping them to improve their profile, financial position and links with the commercial and community radio sectors. Since its launch in 2019, the Fund has supported both new entrants to the independent audio production sector along with well-established independent audio production companies. Feedback points to longer-term, legacy impacts with grant recipients using the funds to help develop relationships with commercial commissioning partners and develop new income streams.

The Fund has supported 165 projects across its three years of delivery, providing 735 hours of innovative and original public service broadcasts. The Fund has secured a broadcast commitment from 350 radio stations and has recorded 57.7 million listeners across the 165 projects, with 95% of this reach attributed to commercial stations, who recorded an average reach of 554,537 per station. The true reach of the Fund is likely to be far greater given that around a third of grant recipients report to have reused or repurposed the content following the completion of their grant (e.g. podcasts or repeat broadcasts).

Compliance with the guidelines on what the funding can be used to cover demonstrates that the use of the funding has remained focused on the overarching objectives for the pilot set out in its Theory of Change. For most grant recipients, their production was solely funded by the Audio Content Fund. As such, this points to the Fund delivering strong additionality, with the public service content produced unlikely to have been created in the absence of the Fund.

The funding has enabled independent audio producers and broadcast partners to pursue a range of ideas and approaches that would have been difficult to secure funding for otherwise. The funding has provided space for concepts and ideas to be nurtured and developed, drawing on a range of contemporary issues and themes for inspiration.

This has resulted in public service content that have pushed the boundaries for broadcast partners whilst also allowing independent audio producers to develop new concepts and collaborations to engage, inspire, educate and move listeners. Many of the broadcasts have tested new ways of working, including innovative methods of capturing and telling stories, of getting under the skin of communities and providing a platform to hidden voices.

One of the key impacts reported by commercial and community broadcast partners has been the value of the Fund in enabling them to air quality public service content. The Fund has introduced them to independent audio providers, enabled them to collaborate in the development of the projects and broadcast innovative speech-based content to inspire, engage, support, and inform their listenership. The independent audio production sector has shown its value in being able to produce engaging and innovative broadcasts that create social value and support individuals and communities within the listenership.

Following completion of their project, many grant recipients were able to diversify their income sources, improving their resilience and supporting the wider sector. In-house survey data captured by ACF Ltd and our own survey data estimates that up to 40 full time jobs and up to 200 part time jobs have been created by grant recipients due to the Fund. They have also doubled the number of contracted freelancer days.

Our GVA assessment points to a return on investment of £0.84m for every £1 invested. This is in addition to the wider organisational benefits derived for broadcast partners and the social impacts for the over 40 million listeners reached by the public service broadcasts. Analysis of the cost per production minute also suggests that the Audio Content Fund has achieved good value on the outputs produced relative to the industry.

Much of the content produced through the Fund has ongoing value and relevance to society, highlighting a potential for further repurposing to educate, inform and inspire communities across the UK. Moving forward any similar future funds could consider combining open rounds with further themed or issue-based rounds. These themed rounds may attract investment from government departments, Trusts and Foundations and organisations with an interest in representing hidden voices and shining a light on contemporary issues in modern Britain. This would help to further stimulate and sustain the market place for independent audio producers and expand the broadcast of quality public service content across the commercial and community radio sectors.

Recommendations

1. The breadth and quality of public service content produced across the Audio Content Fund has the potential to provide valuable education and learning resources to support continued social benefits for individuals and communities. Subject to licensing requirements, the design of any similar future funding should consider allocating resource to draw these together as resources for use by education institutions and VCSFE organisations.
2. The design and development of any similar funding should be supported by organisations representing the intended key recipients
3. The funding requirements for any future funds could consider giving merit for applicants that accommodate work experience and placements to support young people seeking to gain experience within the sector.
4. The design of any similar funding in the future could also consider enabling or encouraging collaborative bids from independent audio producers.
5. Any future funding should consider providing resource or guidance within the grant funding awards to enable broadcasters to capture feedback from listeners, including those engaging with live content as well as through podcasts and streamed services.
6. The design of any similar funds in the future should review the capacity needs of managing the programme based on a projected number of rounds and applications but also to include the facilitation of networking events across independent audio producers and establishing dialogue with prospective investors such as Government Departments and Trusts and Foundations.
7. Whilst the focus on funding content that will be broadcast live on the radio should be retained, the design of any future funds should also encourage or require grant recipients to repurpose content for wider dissemination via on-demand and streaming services. This will help to extend reach and engage audiences who are less likely to engage with live on-air content and reflect evolving radio and audio listening habits.

8. Case studies

Supporting the wellbeing of the nation

Project name: The Wellness Workout		Production company: C60MEDIA Ltd
Year: 2	Round: Winter Loneliness	Broadcaster: Multiple
First TX: 15/3/21	Reach: 17,548	ACF grant (£): 19,140
Format: Short	Total Duration: 1.6 hours	Cost per Listener Hour: £4.79

Reason for seeking grant support:

C60Media Ltd is a video and podcast production company based in London that has been operating since 2014. Whilst the company had experience of delivering work commissioned by the BBC, prior to the Audio Content Fund (ACF) grant they had no links with the commercial or community radio sector. The grant funded was an opportunity for them to produce an original and innovative public service broadcast and develop relationships with new broadcast partners. The Wellness Workout was solely funded through the ACF grant.



The broadcast:

The concept of the Wellness Workout was developed in response to the [Winter Loneliness special funding round](#), designed to combat loneliness during the Covid Winter of 2020-21. The broadcast aimed to support vulnerable listeners, including those isolated by the pandemic restrictions.

The concept created by C60Media Ltd was promoted by the Local Media Group to a range of community radio stations to ascertain their interest and secure commitments to broadcast. This supported C60Media Ltd in establishing links with a wider network of prospective broadcasters, including two operating close to the company's base.

The Wellness Workout was a two-week series of twice-daily features with mindfulness experts hosted at breakfast and in an evening or weekend spots. Broadcasts featured two- to three-minute workouts as well as interviews with the hosts and experts. The broadcast was first aired on the 15th March 2021 and subsequently broadcast by 14 community radio stations.⁴⁰ Further details on the broadcast and expert hosts can be accessed at the [Wellness Workout webpage](#).

⁴⁰ Includes: Brumside Radio, Chelmer Radio, Eava, Elastic FM, Hillz FM, Kane FM, Radio Wymondham, Seahaven, SJC Radio, The Beat London, Ujima Radio, West Kent Radio, Westside Radio, Winchester Radio

Impact on the production company:

The grant funding enabled C60 Media Ltd to take on new assistant producers to fulfil the production. The broadcast and subsequent repurposing of the content on a dedicated [YouTube channel](#) has helped to raise the company's profile, establish ongoing relationships with community radio stations and support efforts in securing future commissions.

Impact on the broadcaster partner:

The Wellness Workout provided quality speech-based content for a diverse range of community radio stations. It has aided them in providing a social benefit for the communities they serve, in line with the requirements outlined in the Community Radio Order 2004, namely around supporting vulnerable listeners to improve their mental wellbeing and cope through the pandemic.

Collectively the grant funding also supported diversity objectives with all of the presenters and producers and three quarters of the expert contributors being from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Feedback from broadcast partners has been positive, highlighting the value of airing the content and in turn supporting listeners to engage with issues relating to positive mental wellbeing.

“The audio was very relaxed and relatable from a listener's point of view. The information was easily digestible and gave our listeners a sense of being understood which helps the wellness of our audience.” **The Beat London**

“A new and exciting theme that ran through and connected all the Breakfast shows throughout the week – It uplifted everybody including the Presenters.” **Ujima**

“Hearing other people talking about issues that affect so many in the community was refreshing. If possible, I would like the workouts to continue. We should ask the collective to request additional funding so we can continue to create and broadcast this content.”

Kane

“At a time where life was really tough for many people these wellness workouts were a breath of fresh air, they were well produced, very clear and concise content and certainly will have made people stop and think for a few minutes a day about their overall health and wellbeing. This is something we as a radio station would have no hesitation to run again.” **Chelmer Radio**

Impact on listeners:

Feedback provided to the community stations demonstrates the positive impact that the broadcasts and wellbeing workouts have had on listeners. The reach through the community radio stations has enabled the content to reach communities less likely to be engaged through the commercial radio sector and those disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

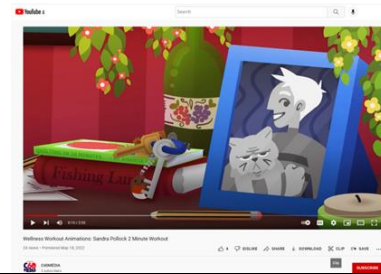
"It encouraged a more positive, proactive and personal ownership of health and wellbeing."

"This has helped my mental health in the climate of Covid-19, it needs to be a regular segment."

"I really enjoyed listening to the workout programme because it gave me something to look forward to everyday. I found myself engaging and relating to the instructors' experiences on life."

"This is just what I've needed, these wellness workouts each morning have helped me with my anxiety and stress thank you Chelmer Radio."

The subsequent hosting of the wellbeing workouts on a dedicated YouTube channel has enabled more people to engage with the content and to use the broadcasts to support their own mental wellbeing. This highlights that the true reach of the broadcast is likely to be greater than reach reported back to ACF at the completion of the project.



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Showcasing diversity in sport

Project name: Cooler Runnings		Production company: Anything But Footy
Year: 3	Round: 8	Broadcaster: talkSPORT
First TX: 4/2/20	Reach: 1,888,400	ACF grant (£): 14,878
Format: Short	Total Duration: 1 hour	Cost per Listener Hour: £0.01

Reason for seeking grant support:

Anything But Footy Limited is a podcast and radio production company and was established in September 2020. The project was not a suitable scale to pitch to the BBC which led to an application to the Fund. Although they had established relationships with commercial broadcasters prior to their Audio Content Fund grant, it enabled the company to overcome funding issues and meant ideas were put into actions quicker.



The broadcast:

The idea behind the broadcast stems from past experience and a strong passion for sport, developing on from the 2012 Olympic games and then the subsequent Commonwealth games. The aim of the broadcast is to shed light on personal and unique stories in sport. The sports broadcasting market is football dominated, and thus having a platform exclusively for football is quite lucrative. As such, securing the grant allowed Anything But Footy to produce something different and give a platform to people and communities in sport that are oftentimes overlooked, including women, Paralympians, and people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

The series of short profile pieces, delivered during the Winter Olympics and Winter Paralympic Games, were hosted by three of Britain's summer games medallists – Charlotte Worthington MBE (BMX), Declan Brooks (BMX) and Will Bayley MBE (Para Table Tennis).

The series covered sports including skating, snowboarding, luge, skeleton, curling, bobsleigh, slalom, alpine and cross-country skiing. The pieces were spread across talkSPORT daytime radio throughout the games, reaching a significant section of their audience. The broadcast covered 30 different athletes, of which 40% were women, 25% were Paralympians and 10% were from minority ethnic backgrounds.

"We are incredibly proud of our achievement delivering unique sporting stories to the world's biggest sports radio station, making them relevant and interesting for a football dominated marketplace." – **Anything But Footy**

Impact on the production company:

The broadcast raised the profile of Anything But Footy and more broadcasters have approached them about future collaborations to produce sport related content. The grant award has enabled the company to deepen their relationship with commercial broadcasters, provided them with fresh ideas, and motivated them to expand their catalogue of work.

In terms of future outlooks, the grant has allowed the company to set up further as a professional resource and given them access to more specialist equipment. This kind of investment is crucial in terms of supporting their future productions, including public service content.

Impact on the broadcaster partner:

The core impact of the grant is allowing talkSPORT to become more diverse. Moreover, it aided them reflect on their own aspirations and what kind of content they wanted to broadcast as well as supporting new and underrepresented voices and talent development. It has facilitated a wider discussion in terms of what audiences actually want from sport-based broadcasters.

"I was delighted with the reaction from our listeners to the Cooler Running's series. We aren't an official broadcaster of the Winter Olympics or Paralympics, so it was vital to bring our audience the best coverage possible of these prestigious events. This was reflected by our listeners over phone and text messages. The Anything But Footy team were a delight to work with and fully understood talkSPORT's working practice. Their packages were sharp and full of energy and delivered engaging and fascinating content to our listeners. I hope to work with them again in the future." - talkSPORT

Impact on listeners:

Team GB, Paralympics GB and many more of the National Governing Sports Bodies like GB Snowsport and British Curling, and the athletes themselves, all supported Cooler Runnings with RTs and their own links to the online versions after broadcast.


Anything But Footy's social media had 55,000 impressions and interactions during the Winter Olympics in February and another 35k for the Winter Paralympics.



Website: www.anythingbutfooty.co.uk/

Email: anythingbutfooty@gmail.com

Resources and learning for young people

Project name: In the Beginning		Production company: Social Broadcasts
Year: 3	Round: 8	Broadcaster: Fun Kids
First TX: 6/7/22	Reach: 43,500	ACF grant (£): 23,187
Format: Short	Total Duration: 1.67 hours	Cost per Listener Hour: £0.32
<p>Reason for seeking grant support:</p> <p>Social Broadcasts is a production company specialising in telling diverse stories and was established in 2015. After being unable to make a successful pitch to the BBC, the ACF grant provided an opportunity to work with a wider range of people and produce an original and diverse broadcast. In the Beginning is funded through the ACF grant.</p> 		
<p>The broadcast:</p> <p>In the Beginning was a fiction-based series of audio dramas for children and the stories are creation myths from around the world. The rationale for the idea was to promote different stories and cultures from around the world. Hearing stories in this format, rather than reading something, means children are engaged and thinking about a topic in a different way, which was integral to the broadcast. The broadcast serves both as a way of acknowledging the experiences of children that have a connection to these cultures and engaging a wider audience of children who aren't aware of these stories and aims to show them just how connected we are.</p> <p>The broadcast includes 10 episodes and was first aired the 6th July 2022.</p>		
<p>Impact on the production company:</p> <p>The ACF grant has contributed to improving both Social Broadcasting's financial position and their future outlook. For the year of receiving the grant, it was a major part of annual income and if more of this work is commissioned, this has a huge impact in the future.</p> <p>Having more support in the area of promotion/marketing side would have been beneficial and led to more of a positive impact as this was somewhat lacking, but overall the ACF grant has allowed Social Broadcast's to open up a whole new strand of fiction drama which they plan to continue to do more of.</p> <p>“We definitely want carry on doing more of this, alongside the other things I do which are more real life focused. It's nice to have something a bit more creative and to do with fiction.” – Social Broadcasts</p>		

Impact on the broadcaster partner:

Having more multi-cultural content and being able to diversify content has had a major impact in terms of delivering something creative and unique. Being able to merge old, indigenous cultures with modern day languages and presenting it in an accessible and understandable format for children undoubtedly has a beneficial impact on Fun Kids.

Impact on listeners:

The series is still available via a range of streaming services including Spotify, Soundcloud and Apple Podcasts. This has enabled more children and young people to be inspired by the series, covering issues relating to cultural and spiritual beliefs across the world.

The series provides a valuable learning resource to support children in understanding and respecting different religions, customs and beliefs.

This can support broader objectives around promoting multiculturalism across the UK and fostering stronger and cohesive communities.



Website:

www.socialbroadcasts.co.uk/social-broadcasting

Email:

lucia@socialbroadcasts.co.uk

Creating original drama

Project name: Prison Bag		Production company: Falling Tree Productions
Year: 1	Round: 2	Broadcaster: National Prison Radio
First TX: 15/4/20	Reach: 93,300	ACF grant (£): 50,124
Format: Long	Total Duration: 5 hours	Cost per Listener Hour: £0.11

Reason for seeking grant support:

Falling Tree Productions is a media company based in London and has been operating since 1998. The company has decades of experience with public service programme making, but prior to the ACF grant, they had made none completely independently. As such, the grant provided a source of money to fund an independent, original and innovative 12-part series that the BBC did not appear to be interested in. Prison Bag was funded exclusively through ACF grant money and is now being commissioned and licenced by the BBC as a podcast.



The broadcast:

The concept of Prison Bag is to follow the family of a prisoner as they struggle with separation, financial insecurity, prejudice, and prison visits. The aim of the podcast is to highlight the lives of people and communities that are oftentimes overlooked and sheds light on the hidden issues within the UK penal system families of prisoners' face.

Prison Bag was broadcast on the National Prison Radio who are based in prison and work with people in prison. As the series is about quite a specific aspect of imprisonment, the impact on families, it provided a valuable outside perspective for them to hear which they would not have been able to access without the series. It was also broadcast by Resonance FM, Reverb FM and Chapel FM.

Prison Bag is a 12-part series and can now be accessed on Spotify/Apple Podcasts/Google Podcasts. Each episode is around 15 minutes long and the broadcast was first aired on the 15th April, 2021. Further details on the broadcast can be accessed via [Falling Tree's](#) website.

Impact on the production company:

The biggest impact has been the BBC not only licensing the podcast, but also commissioning a follow up. Moreover, against the familiar markers (reviews and critics response), the podcast was publicised well and was critically acclaimed. Reviews of Prison Bag were published by The Justice Gap, Observer, Financial Times amongst others.

Without the grant, a smaller and simpler version would have been attempted but without the money, it is likely this would not have been possible.

“We reached a totally underserved community of prison families, I don't how extensive or how much, but just from social media responses, it clearly got into the existing community of prison families.” –

Falling Tree Productions

Impact on the broadcaster partner:

In terms of National Prison Radio, the Fund has provided them with a well-resourced production with an extensive audience reach. Further, the National Prison Radio aim to support people through their prison sentences and an important part of that is trying to reduce people's risk of reoffending after their release. As such, by highlighting issues families may face, as well as the wider community, from imprisonment ultimately works to achieve this outcome.

"I think that was really interesting perspective for them to hear, it had a good impact on our audience, it gave them something they wouldn't have been able to hear otherwise." – **National Prison Radio**

"In terms of what we offer to our listeners, Prison Bag is of a piece with our 2019 broadcast of the monumental 24 Hours of Peace, insofar as it draws us from the sometimes parochial pleasures of our community radio schedule to something profound and arresting." - **Resonance FM**

"Chapel FM / East Leeds FM radio mission is to provide stories, music, interviews, original writing, radio documentaries and oral histories that reflect the aspirations and struggles of our communities, which are in a part of Leeds that has been hit hard by austerity. We particularly create and seek out programmes that provide unvarnished insights into the realities of poverty, lack of resources and the creative ways citizens respond to those challenges. Prison Bag absolutely succeeded in generating conversations and new ideas with our listeners, staff and volunteers, especially the young people we work with, many of whom have had relatives or friends incarcerated." - **Chapel FM**

Impact on listeners:

"They are insightful, emotional and give us an insight to world of a prison wife." –

Listener

"It is so skilfully crafted. It's a proper emotional smorgasbord." – **Listener**

"It highlights the craziness of the criminal injustice system and is deeply human." -

Listener

Feedback given demonstrates the insight into a perhaps overlooked area of imprisonment, highlighting how flawed the criminal justice system is, particularly towards families of prisoners. Listeners also note the emotional nature of the broadcast, showing how the broadcast was able to reach and connect with an audience that may not have even gone through a similar experience.

But new podcast series **Prison Bag** (also serialised on local radio stations and National Prison Radio) which I have been lucky enough to have a sneak preview of reveals uncomfortable truths about having a loved one in prison. Hosted by Josie Bevan, whose husband Rob is currently serving a nine-year sentence, the series is based on a blog of the same name.

We are offered a glimpse into the frustrations of visits, the written and unwritten rules of dress codes for prison visits (bras are compulsory, open-toed sandals are a no-no in some jails. However, top tip: a stash of perfume and mouthwash is informal but essential kit according to one contributor and seasoned visitor). We learn about the dynamics of cellmates and endless frustrations of prison phone calls and arranging visits. In short, softly spoken Josie has become a member of an informal club – the prisoners' families club. Not a club we hear a lot about. Despite the fact there are more than 80 000 plus people in our prisons their families are largely invisible. Yet, it's widely accepted when a person in prison stays in touch with their family they are more likely to stay out of trouble on release.

Website: www.fallingtree.co.uk/

Email: alan.hall@fallingtree.co.uk

Raising visibility of disability issues

Project name: Would Like to Meet		Production company: Exeter Phoenix Ltd
Year: 3	Round: 7	Broadcaster: Community Radio x5
First TX: 1/6/22	Reach: 20,300	ACF grant (£): 10,250
Format: Long	Total Duration: 1.5 hours	Cost per Listener Hour: £0.34

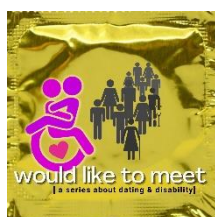
Reason for seeking grant support:

Exeter Phoenix Ltd provided the umbrella organisation to apply for the ACF grant with. An associate artist at Documental Productions applied to the ACF and has been making audio since 2017. For them, the ACF provided an important space for niche concepts which Arts Council England did not offer, and as such, the broadcast is funded entirely by ACF grant money. Furthermore, they were originally a theatre company, and with ACF grant money, Documental Productions (under Exeter Phoenix Ltd) has been able to pivot their content, allowing them to become a more sustainable business which has been integral to their success given the lasting effects of the pandemic.



The broadcast:

The concept of the broadcast is around dating and disability, encouraging listeners to think about ableism in a thought-provoking way. Reframing assumptions around disability is central to the broadcast, telling stories about lived experiences which challenge the societal norm of those with disabilities having a lower social value.



Audiences of stations such as Blind Notes, one of the broadcast partners, are most commonly blind and partially sighted people, and as such, putting a broadcast like this out helps to provide information to them and creates a platform for their voices, which is often underrepresented.

Impact on the production company:

The ACF grant has enabled Documental Productions, under Exeter Phoenix Ltd, to retain high levels of productivity over the last two years, hiring staff, hiring creators, and producing more content. Historically there has not been many opportunities like this and as such the ACF grant has enabled them to hire an increasing number of people from the South West, giving rise to more and better-quality content. The project has been supported by the iMayflower Cultural Development Fund scheme interns who assisted the production, supporting with research and helping with its management. The delivery of the broadcast has resulted in creatives securing work in other regions including the North West where some of the team were based.

Given the success of the documentary series, Exeter Phoenix Ltd and Documental Productions are keen to explore options to widen the distribution of the broadcast to reach and inspire future audiences.

Impact on the broadcaster partner:

Blind Notes, which was one of the broadcast partners, comments on the nature and structure of the ACF:

“I thought the ACF has been so brilliant in terms of supporting independents, and by doing that providing brilliant, creative and innovative content. It has been fantastic.” – **Broadcast partner**

Blind Notes is a niche station and mainly has an audience made up of blind or partially sighted people. Therefore, finding independent producers to produce content that would work for them has consistently been challenging. As such, without the ACF grant enabling producers like Documental Productions to produce something innovative and creative, Blind Notes would not have access to this kind of high-quality content.

Similarly positive feedback has been provided by Care Radio, who broadcast the series twice on DAB across Surrey, South London, Portsmouth and Manchester.

“From my perspective this was so refreshing, the host was funny, honest and inspiring” and “loved it, something I never thought I’d hear on the radio.” **Broadcast partner**

Impact on listeners:

Listeners of Blind Notes, being typically underrepresented in national mainstream media, are being represented through broadcasts such as Would Like to Meet, hearing similar challenges and experiences as those they face every day:

“I think for our audience, to hear about people with similar disabilities and being successful in whatever field we're doing is incredibly useful. Hearing those people talk about the challenges they've had is even more useful. To hear others who have been successful have also faced those similar challenges and frustrations makes you feel less alone and hope there are ways around it.” – **Listener**

Broadcasts such as these are also working to change assumptions and pre-conceptions around disabilities:

“General interest of listening to what these people's lives are, nice to centre them that don't usually get centred. Changing people's pre-conceptions about what is possible, majority of audience are blind/partially sighted but can also just change wider societies perspective of what they can and can't do. That's a big part of what my company is trying to do. As well as the usual things like introducing people to new artists.” – **Listener**

Website: <https://documentaltheatre.co.uk/>

Email: lucindarosebell@yahoo.co.uk

Providing a platform for the LGBTQ+ community

Project name: Tough Talks		Production company: Reform Radio
Year: 2	Round: 4	Broadcaster: Hits Radio and Hits Radio Pride
First TX: 28/8/20	Reach: 99,500	ACF grant (£): 24, 747
Format: Short	Total Duration: 1.33 hours	Cost per Listener Hour: £0.19

Reason for seeking grant support:

Before their ACF grant, Reform Radio had not worked with community radio stations. Through this series, Reform Radio wanted to bring a fresh take on LGBTQ+ content, showing the range of difficult conversations that members of the community have, outside of purely coming out stories, which, previously, they did not have the resources to make. As such, the ACF grant enabled them to create original and innovative content, providing a platform for underrepresented voices and helping to facilitate social action.



REFORM RADIO

The broadcast:

The aim of the broadcast is to reflect on the wider LGBTQ+ community through a documentary piece on what became 'Tough Talks'. From inception, the broadcast put the spotlight on 20 different people who had their equivalent of a 'coming out' story to tell, every one unique.

"They offered a moment of reflection and a window into a conversation that listeners might never have contemplated happening." – **Hits Radio**

The broadcast has been converted into a podcast series, furthering its reach and impact through becoming one of the fastest growing stations in Europe and winning a podcast award.

Impact on the production company:

For Reform Radio, as an audio production house as well as a radio station, it was about turning unique stories into radio. Without the ACF grant, they have limited access to resources to produce the content. The grant has enabled Reform Radio to document stories of underrepresented voices and solidifying relationships with other stations, such as Gaydio in Manchester. The social benefit to the production is profound on both an individual and wider community basis, representing a diverse range of backgrounds and cultures.

In terms of financial impact, the ACF grant has enabled Reform Radio to budget for the financial year as well as benefitting greatly from the upfront payment. Due to this increase in funding, Reform Radio comment that "for the first time, we are making radio in the way that we want to make it."

Impact on the broadcaster partner:

Tough Talks has significant promotional value and has therefore contributed to raising the profile of both Hits Radio and Hits Radio Pride. Further, the broadcaster comments that in terms of listenership, the broadcast exposes more people to new language which they may have previously been unaware of, such as gender fluidity, and therefore highlights the importance of giving a platform to this kind of content and making it a part of our language.

“The initial pop-up phase of Hits Radio Pride would not have been what it was without ‘Tough Talks’; it was integral and as we go forward, we will still be able to use the content created to keep encouraging these types of conversations to take place.” – **Hits Radio**

Impact on listeners:

Many listeners commented on the benefits of being able to reflect on past talks and relive moments that they had perhaps not revisited:

“I’m so impressed with this episode - nicely done. Thank you. You’ve really been able to strip away all the details and capture the heart of the issue: what it’s like for someone queer, when they have to educate a loved one about their queerness and hold that loved one in their own journey, even though that journey is about whether they are going to be able to accept the queer person. This is such a common dynamic, and very rarely spoken about so I did really want there to be a piece about it.” – **Listener**


“Does what it says on the tin. Tough talk. Very important conversation right here. Well worth your time.” – **Listener**

“These are heartfelt personal stories, and you can hear just how much they mean to the people they interviewed. Really emotional. I teared up hearing how Rachel’s 83-year-old mum Norah reacted to her daughter revealing she is trans. Beautiful.” - **Listener**


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Place identity and place making

Project name: Belfast: A City Reborn		Production company: Yamal Productions
Year: 3	Round: 9	Broadcaster: U105
First TX: Awaiting	Reach: To be aired	ACF grant (£): 8,555
Format: Long	Total Duration: 1.25 hours	Cost per Listener Hour: £0.12
Reason for seeking grant support: <p>Yamal Productions Ltd is a production company established in 1995 and working between Belfast and The Highlands. With the audio landscape changing, where BBC opportunities to produce something niche being limited, the company sought an ACF grant to create something original and contemporary. Belfast: A City Reborn is funded solely through ACF grant money.</p>		
The broadcast: <p>The idea behind the broadcast stems from creating a different perception of Belfast, tracing the city's transformation to a popular tourist destination and shining the spotlight on areas such as the film industry and the food industry. This five-part series traces the transformation of Belfast from a city under siege to a post Good Friday Agreement landscape and will examine how Belfast is now renowned as a popular tourist destination, a location for international film production and a growing hi-tech industry centre with a thriving entertainment scene and a vibrant nightlife. It also examines the "ripple effect" – how Belfast's success is creating opportunities for other parts of Northern Ireland.</p>		
Impact on the production company: <p>The main impact on Yamal Productions Ltd has been on their profile as a production company, with more contacts and an increased general awareness of their work and services. In terms of social impact, it is hoped that the content shows young people the opportunities Belfast has to offer, particularly in the creative sectors. Yamal Productions Ltd note that if this occurs, their primary task is completed:</p> <p>“We believe if an audience is given some insight into aspects of life around them, it makes them think a little bit more about the potential of their area. We hope the programmes will do this as well as be an enjoyable listen.” – Yamal Productions Ltd</p>		
Impact on the broadcaster partner: <p>The broadcast is yet to go out – however Yamal Productions Ltd do comment that broadcasts like this will contribute to enhancing the range and quality of speech-based programmes on commercial and community radio.</p>		
Impact on listeners: <p>The broadcast will go out between December 2022 and January 2023.</p>		
Website: https://www.yamal.co.uk/		Email: kathleen@yamal.co.uk

Showcasing and celebrating music genres

Project name: Jazz FM Virtual Jazz Festival		Production company: Somethin' Else
Year: 2	Round: Coronavirus	Broadcaster: Jazz FM
First TX: 12/4/20	Reach: 232,300	ACF grant (£): 19,043
Format: Long	Total Duration: 3 hours	Cost per Listener Hour: £0.03
<p>Reason for seeking grant support:</p> <p>Somethin' Else is an international podcast company established in 1991 with bases in London and New York. The Virtual Jazz Festival is funded solely through the ACF grant, enabling the company to make original content and provided the opportunity to offer programmes outside of the BBC.</p>		
<p>The broadcast:</p> <p>The broadcast delivered on a super-charged international line-up of quality artists, including Grammy winners, supporting our UK Music Day, and provided content that has lived beyond its sole transmission expectations. With live music venues closed and all events cancelled, jazz artists were hit harder than most. With many earning a living as session musicians, or artists without label backing, the lockdown conditions were particularly difficult for jazz players. Jazz FM's Virtual Jazz Festival therefore aimed to raise money for UK jazz musicians, with tracks played throughout the day followed by this three-hour virtual jazz festival to end the day.</p>		
<p>Impact on the production company:</p> <p>The ACF grant meant Somethin' Else could produce content that would typically not be picked up by other radio networks. They comment that:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">The content was meaningful in a way that the radio networks could have never funded without this.” – Somethin' Else.</p> <p>As a larger scale international company Somethin' Else have experience of delivering much larger commissions than funded through ACF. However, whilst the grant funding may have delivered less impact when compared with small to medium size production companies, it allowed them to turnaround a high-quality production in collaboration with Jazz FM that achieved considerable reach and proved hugely positive for audiences through the pandemic.</p>		

Impact on the broadcaster partner:

The broadcast was evidently a success given streaming numbers and exceeding initial expectations:

“Our streaming numbers shows that for that week Jazz FM’s Virtual Jazz Festival had more streams from catchup at jazzfm.com than any other single broadcast on the station from the same period. This programme delivered more than we could have dreamed of.” –

Jazz FM

This has contributed to raising the station’s profile with jazz music fans as well as improving their financial position and future financial outlook. They were able to offer more to their audience by bringing on board major names in the jazz sector, including Eric Bibb, Madeleine Peyroux and Kurt Elling.

Impact on listeners:

Many listeners commented on how the broadcast was particularly positive for those experiencing isolation during the pandemic and associated lockdowns:

“Fantastic listen today! It has lived up to expectations so far. We must remember all the musicians out there who are facing such uncertain times. We are relying on their talents more than ever at the moment to keep us going. Let’s make sure we support them and pay it forward.” - **Listener**


“Thanks for the company for those of us in isolation and alone over the long weekend.” –
Listener

“Had @jazzfm on all weekend and it really helped me to get through what could have been a difficult few days being in complete solitary confinement. So a big thank you!” - **Listener**

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Email : Chris.Skinner@somethinelse.com

Exploring equality and diversity issues in the UK

Project name: Equal Britain?		Production company: Loftus Media
Year: 1	Round: 3	Broadcaster: talkRADIO
First TX: 30/10/20	Reach: 151,800	ACF grant (£): 27,375
Format: Long	Total Duration: 3.33 hours	Cost per Listener Hour: £0.05
<p>Reason for seeking grant support:</p> <p>Loftus Media is a production company based in London and created in 2015. The ACF grant enabled the company to explore race, sex, religion, disability, gender reassignment, age, sexual orientation and class through the eyes of a diverse range of people across the UK. This content is funded solely through the ACF grant to promote diversity and produce a broadcast that tackles under-representation.</p> 		
<p>The broadcast:</p> <p>The original idea behind the broadcast was to explore equality through the stories of “real” people and high-profile names. However, the original format had to change radically: COVID-19 meant a pause of several months in the project, limited studio access, presenter changes at talkRADIO and a shift in station strategy towards video, therefore making the format highly ambitious with 30 audio “drop in” features each one telling a different story about a person/issue. Ultimately, the delays meant Loftus and talkRADIO had to re-imagine the series, however this necessarily resulted in a format whose breadth exceeded all benchmarks set. Putting real people at the heart of the series was its strength as well as delving into the deepest corners of modern Britain – hearing voices that usually go unheard.</p> <p>The features got to the heart of “real life” equality experience of race, gender, sex equality, class, disability, and age. From how lockdown affected older people through the eyes of Caerphilly male voice choir, to social mobility through the experience of a teenage mum in Middlesbrough, the features confounded stereotypes and had a wide range of tone.</p>		
<p>Impact on the production company:</p> <p>The broadcast had significantly high public service value, giving a platform to voices which would typically not be heard in mainstream radio – Loftus Media comments the content provided “a rich mix of audio” and the ACF grant meant they “didn't shy away from difficult areas and worked well with talkRADIO’s Holly Keogh on identifying and handling controversial material or language”.</p>		

Impact on the broadcaster partner:

The ACF grant enabled talkRADIO to uncover hidden experiences within modern British society and share them with their listeners, as well as capture a wider audience:

“It was a real privilege to be able to tell these stories, with thanks to the Audio Content Fund - to be allowed to dig into these experiences and share them with our audience.” –

talkRADIO presenter

Further, the nature of the issues and the people taking part means talkRADIO was able to generate further ongoing interest. Contributors and organisations such as Scope, Mankind, and the NHS all shared their content on social media platforms.

Impact on listeners:

Whilst no feedback was captured by talkRADIO, the entire series is available on [Soundcloud](#), providing a lasting resource for communities to connect with and be informed and inspired by the stories and contributions of real people.

Website: <https://loftusmedia.co.uk/>

Email: d.king@loftusmedia.co.uk

Providing a voice for hidden communities

Project name: Caring for Carers		Production company: John Dash Media Ltd
Year: 2	Round: Coronavirus	Broadcaster: Community Radio x 42
First TX: 04/05/20	Reach: 100,000	ACF grant (£): 27,050
Format: Short	Total Duration: 1 hour	Cost per Listener Hour: £0.27

Reason for seeking grant support:

John Dash left the commercial radio sector and set up John Dash Media Ltd to independently produce content and work with a more diverse and broader range of people. The ACF grant has allowed him to think of ideas that typically would be difficult to secure funding for. The ACF grant has enabled the production of unique and original content broadcast by over forty community radio stations.



The broadcast:

There are approximately 8.8 million unpaid Carers in the UK. The concept for the broadcast was to share lessons learned from those who have, through medical conditions, isolated pre pandemic, with those who have had to shelter or isolate during the pandemic and being affected by subsequent Government restrictions on movement.

Different people's experiences with isolation provided the foundations for the broadcast, aiming to show a wider audience what lessons could be learned from isolation. The aim of the broadcast was ultimately to shed light on those who care for others on a day-to-day basis, speaking to the challenges they face. The broadcast featured a series of short-form interviews with carers and those they care for, hosted by Gyles Brandreth. Subsequently, after speaking to a whole range of people, a new radio station has been created to exclusively be a voice for carers and is being supported by radio industry.

Impact on the production company:

As a result of the ACF grant, John Dash Media Ltd has been able to increase their production work, networking and working with more community radio stations and sub-contracting to other stations. As the company explains, this network did not exist prior to the ACF grant:

“Struck a chord and ended up on over 100 community and small commercial stations - built a network around it which didn't exist before.” – **John Dash Media Ltd**

In turn, this has meant the ACF grant has also significantly contributed to improving both the company's financial position and their future outlook.

Impact on the broadcaster partner:

As most of the broadcasters were community radio stations, their aim is to support their audience with advice and information through sharing lived experiences – which Caring for Carers had the ability to do:

“The professional way the series was packaged was exceptional. We absolutely appreciated that the audio was delivered well in advance of broadcast and the support of the producers at John Dash Media was very much appreciated.” – **Broadcaster**

“The features provided a lot of reassurance to our audience, many of whom rely on the radio station for information.” – **Broadcaster**

Impact on listeners:

“Heart-warming stories and advice to support carers and the cared for at this difficult time.”-
Listener

“Caring for Carers didn’t just give a voice to one person who was being interviewed but gave a voice to many people with shared experiences, and it helped support our listeners, so they know they are not on their own.”- **Broadcaster**

Website:

www.audiocontentfund.org.uk/projects/caring-for-carers/

Email: john@johndash.media

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