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Press Release

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Indie radio producers call for ring-fencing of BBC radio budget

The Radio Independents Group has published its response to BBC Charter Review. The independent radio producers' trade body supports a BBC which remains universal in appeal and well-funded by the Licence Fee.

But in terms of likely cuts to content spend as a result of the Licence Fee deal, they state that these should not apply to radio.

The RIG response says:

'Whilst we believe BBC Radio services could offer more diverse programmes and ensure they continue to be distinctive and not impact upon commercial radio stations, it is an important part of what the BBC does, with 65% of the UK adult population listening to BBC Radio each week.'

'Radio budgets, which used to keep pace with inflation, have in recent years declined in cash terms and even more so in real terms. This cannot continue without impacting on programme creativity and quality in ways which will be noticeable by the listener.'

Managing Director Will Jackson said:

"Tony Hall has talked of making up to 20% cuts as a result of the recent Licence Fee deal. Applying those cuts to the radio budget would disproportionately affect services which remain very popular and in many cases are unique. The BBC Trust's service review of speech radio called for protection of quality and range in the face of pressure on budgets, particularly in comedy and drama. While recognising the importance of those specific genres, we believe that approach should be applied across all of BBC Radio."

"Using our ability to scale up or down flexibly, indies have been able to accommodate falling budgets but we don't believe that, irrespective of productions being made in-house or out-of-house, BBC radio can take further cuts without a significant effect on the output."

RIG's response also calls on the BBC Charter process to enshrine in statute the BBC's Compete or Compare commitment to introduce competition from indies for 60% of eligible radio hours, and require that a level playing field is established in the commissioning process, ensuring in-house and out-of-house are treated the same, as well as the many production companies outside the M25.

ENDS

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Notes:

1. The Radio Independents Group (RIG) is the trade body for the independent audio-led production sector in the UK. RIG provides business affairs support, policy representation, and negotiates terms of trade with the BBC. RIG also produces the annual Radio Production Awards¹, which uniquely recognise and celebrate the production skills of radio and audio producers across the whole industry. In association with the Department for Business Innovation & Skills and Creative Skillset, RIG has also established RIGtrain², a £350,000 training programme which is on course to reach more than 800 learners over a period of 18 months between November 2014 and March 2016.
2. The BBC Trust speech services review published its conclusions in August, stating that: "Radio 4's content costs are higher than other BBC radio stations due to the volume of short programmes with relatively high production costs ... It is important that future budget plans do not affect the quality of Radio 4's output, particularly in new drama and comedy, where it has a unique role on UK radio"³.

¹ <http://www.radioproductionawards.co.uk/>

² <http://www.rigtrain.co.uk/>

³ Review of BBC Radios 4, 4 Extra, 5Live, 5Live Sports Extra. BBC Trust, August 15, P4