



Company report review

BBC
Corporate Social Responsibility
Report 2003/2004

Maplecroft

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Company report review – BBC

The BBC provides a wide range of programs, including television, radio, national, local, childrens', educational, language and other services for key interest groups. The organization's self-declared purpose is to 'enrich people's lives with programs and services that inform, educate and entertain.'

As the only UK broadcaster financed by a TV license paid by households, the BBC does not have to serve the interests of advertisers, or produce a return for shareholders. BBC services are used by over 90% of the UK population every week and account for 43% of overall TV and radio consumption.

The BBC formally began to address Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in 2003 and the present CSR report is the first it has produced. The report covers the BBC's responsibilities in terms of serving audiences; in business; in communities; in the office; and in the environment.

CSR management

The Corporate Social Responsibility Centre, set up in 2003, provides coordination and implementation of the BBC's CSR strategy, reporting to the Director of Policy and Legal. A CSR Board chaired by the Director General provides strategic direction, while regular internal stakeholder forums help develop processes and best practices.

The BBC is a founding member of the Media CSR Forum which recently commissioned a detailed stakeholder consultation on what CSR means for media organizations.

Serving audiences

For the BBC, CSR is most directly achieved through 'the impact our programs have on enriching the quality of society as a whole.' Television, radio and internet have the ability to communicate the issues and arguments around responsible behavior and encourage people to take action, as well as expose unethical activities. The BBC recognizes that its first responsibility is to make high quality programs that are impartial, fair and accurate.

Safeguarding children

BBC output is free of advertising and product placement. This year the BBC Child Protection Policy was introduced to complement existing guidance. The BBC is the only broadcaster providing a news service specifically for children, with a website on 'What to do if the news upsets you.' BBC online also provides a family-friendly search tool of 12,000 recommended sites.

Reflecting UK diversity

The BBC recognizes its responsibility 'to serve all sections of society in the UK with programs that reflect the composition of society as it is'. Since January 2003, all newly submitted program proposals have been measured against that commitment. Specific targets over the next two years include increasing disabled representation in drama (currently 1% in peak time), and subtitling all output (currently over 80%).

Global impact

BBC World Service and Global News run the corporation's international news operations across all media. The BBC reports from nearly every country in the world, including those with oppressive regimes. The main priorities are to protect staff, maintain impartiality and expose human rights abuses.

According to its report, the BBC believes it has special responsibilities in developing countries 'to look beyond the clichés of corruption and poverty' – in the autumn of 2004, 30 BBC executives met with experts and activists from 15 developing countries to explore ways in which the organization could do more to reflect the diversity of ordinary life. Further, in 2005, the BBC is committed to a major multimedia season on Africa and a special week on China.

BBC Worldwide currently licenses 40,000 hours of programming abroad annually – around 50% of total UK television exports. The BBC World Service broadcasts in 43 languages to 146 million regular listeners. The BBC World Service Trust, a charity established in 1999, uses media specifically for social development in 23 countries.

Inspiring learning

In 2004, the BBC introduced a learning strategy that aims to maximize impact beyond the broadcast. The report notes a number of successes, such as the Big Read which inspired the creation of 2,000 new reading groups. A system of '360 degree' commissioning means that interactive and online elements are integrated from the earliest stages of a program project. The BBC is planning a 3-4 year literacy campaign from 2005 to help those with a reading age of under 14 (one in five of the population) and the development of a more systematic method of measuring impact beyond the broadcast.

Support beyond the broadcast

The BBC recognizes it has a responsibility to portray disturbing or sensitive issues with care and to offer appropriate support for audiences after programs are broadcast. BBC Action Line operates 2,000 telephone helplines a year after TV and radio programs are broadcast. In 2004, there were over half a million calls to the service. BBC works with 4,000 charities and public organizations on counseling and information referral.

In business

The BBC is a £3.7 million business. As well as providing employment for 27,000 staff, the BBC works with 10,000 freelancers, nearly 250 production companies and over 15,000 suppliers. In 2003/04, it invested nearly £1 billion in independent producers, external facilities and payments to artists and creators.

In 2004, the BBC introduced a CSR dimension throughout the supply chain tender process, setting out standards in ethical employment and environmental practices. The BBC reports that all new suppliers and, over the coming years, all existing suppliers will be expected to meet this part of the tender process and that compliance will be monitored.

In 2005, BBC plans to publish a Partnership Commitment covering non-commercial relationships – formalising more of its existing partnerships and creating a channel for new partners.

Communities

The BBC's main operations are in London, where 60% of staff (15,000 people) are based. In addition, there are 20 regional centers, 40 local radio stations and news bureau in over 100 UK locations and 42 overseas.

In this section, the BBC reports on: core output with a strong community theme; output that encourages fundraising support; ways in which communities are given a voice; the impact on communities of new BBC buildings; and the contribution of BBC staff 'out and about'. Some of the highlights are as follows:

- BBC Children in Need is the BBC's own corporate charity. The BBC also uses broadcast appeals and telephone voting lines to raise money. A total of £111 million was raised in 2003.
- Connecting with Communities is the BBC's employee volunteering scheme. In a 2002 sample survey, 25% of staff said they volunteered with the support of the BBC – another survey is planned for 2005.

The office

In 2003/4, the BBC conducted its biggest ever staff consultation process 'Making it Happen.' According to the report, 'the biggest message from staff was that they wanted better leadership.' In response, the BBC has developed a new six-month Leadership Program in partnership with Ashridge Business School which 7,000 staff will complete by 2008. Feedback also suggested that only 54% of staff find training useful for career development. The BBC has committed to invest £50 million in more relevant training in the coming year.

The BBC has established policies to deal with bullying and harassment and is now taking steps to improve monitoring. An independently administered whistleblowing policy has been established. With regards diversity, the BBC achieved its

target of 10% for overall ethnic minority representation and 4% for senior management. In a second disability audit, 2.7% staff disclosed a disability. New targets to be met by 2007 include 12.5% for ethnic minority staff and 4% for disabled people. Across all staff, 49.3% are female, including 37% in senior management.

The environment

This section reports on:

- BBC programs on environmental issues. Over the next three years, BBC is planning the UK's biggest ever mass-participation conservation campaign 'Turning Britain green.'
- BBC's own environmental performance. In 2003, greenhouse gas emissions were cut by 17% and total energy consumption by 5% (per broadcast hour).
- BBC Radio Times is now printed on paper from sustainable forests.

Our comments



The BBC has produced an interesting and accessible first CSR report. CSR fits well with the organization's ethos as a 'public service broadcaster' and appears to be firmly on the agenda of senior management, with a CSR Board chaired by the Director-General. The BBC's Annual Report and Accounts includes a section on 'Being accountable and responsible,' with a discussion of the BBC's approach to CSR and current initiatives, which also suggests good corporate citizenship is a core consideration.

In particular, there is intelligent and careful discussion in this report of the BBC's primary responsibilities in terms of the impact of its programs on people and society. It is also good to see the BBC acknowledge its shortcomings, particularly from its recent staff consultation process, with a focus on improving performance captured in 'What More Can We Do Boxes.'

The report is weaker in terms of the nuts and bolts of relevant decision-making processes and procedures. Producer and editorial guidelines are merely referenced, with little discussion of some of the dilemmas that must arise in interpreting social responsibility, balancing conflicting viewpoints and catering to mass and minority audiences. In a number of instances, there is insufficient information as to how policies and guidelines are implemented. In one example, the report states all new suppliers will be monitored to ensure they meet a set of CSR criteria in the tender process but does not indicate how this will be achieved.

The BBC's Corporate Social Responsibility Report 2003/2004 is available at:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/info/csr/pdfs/CSR_report_full.pdf



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