



PRS for Music response to BBC Public Interest Test consultation on new digital radio station proposals

About PRS for Music

PRS for Music is a world-leading music collective management organisation representing the rights of more than 165,000 songwriters, composers and music publishers around the globe. Headquartered in the UK, it works diligently on behalf of its members to grow and protect the value of their rights. With a focus on innovation and integrity, PRS for Music is redefining the global standard for music royalties to ensure creators are paid whenever their musical compositions and songs are streamed, downloaded, broadcast, performed and played in public. In 2022, PRS for Music collected £964m and paid out £836.2m in royalties.

PRS for Music response

PRS for Music welcomes the opportunity to respond to this Public Interest Test consultation on the BBC's proposals to introduce four new music radio stations on DAB+: Radio 1 Dance, and extensions to Radio 1, Radio 2, and Radio 3.

We strongly welcome the BBC's proposals to extend its music provision through these new stations, which cover a range of genres including dance, pop and classical, and create further opportunities for usage of PRS for Music members' musical works. The BBC and PRS for Music have a longstanding and trusted partnership which has spanned many decades. The blanket licence agreement between PRS for Music and the BBC covers the full suite of the BBC's public service activities, delivering significant value to the songwriters, composers and music publishers we represent.

PRS for Music looks forward to continued engagement with the BBC to support the proposed re-launch of the Radio 1 Dance stream and launch of the three new stations as BBC Sounds-only streams later this year whilst the regulatory process takes place about their distribution on DAB+. We understand this process is subject to a materiality assessment, which is a separate regulatory process from the Public Interest Test consultation.

Public value of the new stations

The BBC plays an integral role in the UK's music ecosystem across all its platforms, from radio to TV and online, providing by far the broadest and most culturally diverse music offering in the UK. The proposals for new digital radio stations follow from the BBC's public purpose under the Charter to serve diverse communities, provide distinctive output across a range of genres, and support the creative economy. With the establishment of these new radio stations, the BBC has an opportunity to evolve its cultural impact. To ensure the BBC truly fulfils its obligations under the Charter, we recommend the proposals are enhanced to include a minimum number of unique tracks for each radio station, alongside an allocation of overall content share dedicated to new music and homegrown talent.

Supporting the creative economy through commitments to new and British music

BBC radio services play an unparalleled role in supporting new, British music, and are the catalyst for many songwriters and composers to begin their professional careers. In 2020, PRS for Music data shows that nearly 2,000 emerging creators received their first ever music royalty from a BBC play. 7 of the top 10 biggest selling songs of 2022 came from artists championed by their local BBC Music Introducing show.

Considering the unique position of the BBC as a public service broadcaster and its duty to support the creative economy, it is noteworthy that only two of the four proposed stations – Radio 1 Dance and Radio 3 extension – will provide a platform to support the development and emergence of new music. This comes at a time when the BBC’s championing of new music appears to be challenged in light of the cuts announced last year to the number of BBC Music Introducing programmes broadcast on its local radio stations, from 32 regional shows to 20.

With respect to supporting homegrown talent, it is promising that British music will constitute at least one-third of overall content share across three of the four new radio stations. However, such a requirement is not applied to the Radio 3 extension. The BBC significantly enriches the UK’s classical music scene and is the primary commissioner of contemporary classical music. Failing to ringfence part of Radio 3 extension radio plays to British compositions would constitute a missed opportunity, particularly in the context of concerns surrounding the future of the BBC’s classical provision following last year’s proposed cuts to BBC Orchestras.

To ensure that the BBC provides opportunities to the broadest possible range of songwriters and composers, and fulfils its responsibilities towards maintaining a vibrant cultural scene, **we propose that the BBC commits to playing new music on all four of its new radio stations, and for works by British composers to constitute at least one-third of music on the Radio 3 extension, in line with the other extensions.**

Volume of unique tracks and distinctiveness of content

BBC radio services provide far greater opportunities for our members than commercial stations. Usage data reported to PRS for Music shows that 149,059 unique works were played across all BBC radio stations in 2023, of which 77% were not played on commercial radio.

BBC data shows that Radio 2 played 15,759 different tracks in 2023, while 12,248 were played on Radio 1. The number of unique tracks played across these two stations last year exceeds the combined total of 20,000 unique tracks per year that the BBC proposes to play across all four new radio stations. This could lead to the new stations failing to be sufficiently distinct to the commercial sector.

To ensure the BBC fulfils its public purpose to provide diverse output, the annual allocation of unique musical works played across the new stations should increase and cover each station. **Based on the data reported above, 12,000 unique tracks per year would seem an achievable and reasonable objective.**