



Jenny Abramsky
BBC Broadcasting House
Portland Place
London
W1A 1AA

12 April 2004

Dear Jenny Abramsky,

Re: BBC Radio – 1Xtra

Thank you for your letter of 23 March 2004. We appreciate the thoroughness and candour of your response. However, we feel that whilst the totality of our concerns afforded a level of convergence, there are three distinct and serious themes encapsulated within both our correspondence which would better served by responding to the BBC Nations and Region Division and BBC Radio and Music Division separately. A breakdown of the various issues is as follows;

- The first is an official complaint asserting the BBC's failure to provide substantive, relevant, diverse, non-stereotypical and in depth specialist programming for the African British community by BBC London 96.9FM.
- Our second complaint regards the BBC's failure and unwillingness to provide a national BBC African British radio network that accurately reflects and supports African Britons without consistently negatively caricaturing the community or marginalising relevant issues.
- Our final complaint asserts the BBC's failure to ensure 1Xtra adhered to its stated remit, achieved its targets and finally provided a distinct service of value to African British BBC license fee payers.

The background you provided for rationale behind the BBC's launch of the Asian network is appreciated. We were very disappointed to read that the BBC has no plans to develop an African British Advisory Council, preferring to assert its awareness of our community needs through the limited input of members on the Regional Advisory Council. In stark contrast the 2002/2003 BBC Annual Report under the heading of 'Listening to Asian Audiences' stated;

Over the past year, the Governors reviewed the BBC's accountability to Asian audiences in the light of feedback from their consultation on cultural diversity in 2000 and the fact that, now that BBC Asian Network has become a UK wide service, the regional remit and status of the Asian Network Advisory Council is no longer appropriate.



Choice FM was the comparative pre-existing network for the African British community. This application was made during a period where a void of licensed radio services specifically for our community existed. Choice committed to filling that vacuum, but has consistently failed to do so in recent years. Last month it was acquired by the Capital Radio Group who have stated that their new target core demographic is the ABC1, 15–24 'urban' adult audience. Choice FM is also a predominantly music based station.

As you may be aware, the African British community is one of the largest ethnic minority groups within the UK. With the increasing growth of migration from African and African Diasporic regions there has been a substantial change with a dynamic emergent of sub-communities within the African British whole. Despite this fact there still remains no sustained national programming representing the diverse range of cultural, spiritual, and social interests for us as BBC license fee payers. We frequently engage in media based community consultation. What has emerged from these forums is an overwhelming and consistent feeling of dissatisfaction with BBC programming for the African British community in London.

Despite the BBC requesting permission from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to launch a station (1Xtra) dedicated to 'black' music, giving support to young UK music makers, whilst tailoring news and analysis for an in the main young underserved ethnic audience, the station has a record of failing to adhere to its remit. Indeed, in a letter sent to Ligali on 5 March 2003 from Gary Briggs, BBC Editorial & Investigation Team, it was clearly stated that;

*Whilst 1Xtra is **not primarily a station for black people** [our emphasis] it would be wrong for me (and we did recognize this point in our proposal) not to acknowledge that indeed a fair number of our listeners would be from ethnic minorities.*

1Xtra is aimed at fans of 'black music' and is not targeting any specific ethnic group [our emphasis] to the exclusion of any other. Anyone who is a fan of black music will be a target listener for the station.

Indeed the BBC Annual Report 2002/2003 reaffirms this position when it states that '*1Xtra was launched to fill a gap in radio services for young fans of urban music* [our emphasis]. *The digital station has brought new talent to air and features a mixture of speech-based programming which tackles issues relevant to its audience.*'

The 1Xtra core demographic is 'urban'. In the absence of the requested playlist and audience figures the BBC declined to give us (for copyright and 'commercially sensitive' reasons), our own research has indicated that the majority of 'urban' listeners are not African British but from the wider community. Indeed the largest fan base and consumers of black/urban music in the UK is not ethnic minority communities, but the same demographic served extensively by BBC Radio 1, Capital FM, Kiss FM and Choice FM. It is also important to mention that the African British community is by large, socio-economically disadvantaged, and whilst a large

number of our community has digital satellite access, the majority has neither broadband access or the DAB equipment required to receive 1Xtra.

It is our belief that the BBC has failed as an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to African Britons through what would seem to be processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to disadvantaging African Britons through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and stereotyping.

If we were to ignore the related comments quoted above in the BBC Annual report and focus on your stated comments with regards to 1Xtra’s tailor made news and analysis relevant to its audience, more evidence of the BBC’s failure to deliver an appropriate service emerges. 1Xtra’s original remit stated that ‘1Xtra from the BBC will offer: social action and topical debates of interest and relevance to the target audience via 250 hours a year of daily discussion shows...’, In a press statement issued by the BBC in August 2002, the BBC also claimed that “[t]he station will have its own dedicated news team and a key element of 1Xtra will be a nightly discussion programme.’

Network:1Xtra	
Commitment (Targets)	Notes
250 hours a year of daily discussion shows	161 hours delivered against a pro rata target of 155 hours
Around 20% of output to be speech of which around 10% will be news documentaries and social action programmes	19.1% speech but only 6.9% news, documentaries and social action

Source: BBC Annual Report 2002/2003

As the above table reveals BBC 1xtra failed on all counts.

It is an important part of our work to encourage and support positive programming within the BBC. As such, we acknowledge and commend the work carried out by the TX team and initiatives like the ‘Homegrown’ weekends. These should remain a weekly feature of the networks programming. We also recommend that similar to the Radio 1 music output, British artists should make up 50% of the playlist.

We are very concerned that by employing a target orientated strategy of doubling the duration of TX, the BBC has resorted to deploying cost saving tactics at the expense of delivering on 1Xtra’s full remit. The inclusion of a nightly discussion programme in the guise of a topical phone in should still remain a key element of 1Xtra. If the BBC is indeed truly committed to social action then this would be the ideal candidate for the Monday night slot on BBC Radio 1



enabling 1Xtra to showcase its offering to a wider analogue audience than the predominantly metropolitan listeners to the digital service.

In summary, the African British community still remains underserved by the BBC. The most obvious solutions are to either completely reform and overhaul 1Xtra or create a new national network. Either option would need to be developed in tandem with a public African British Advisory Council and be focused on delivering a relevant service similar to the BBC Asian Network, but tailored to the African British community.

BBC Asian Network relaunched as a national digital network in October 2002, broadcasting approximately 50% music and 50% [high quality] speech with a strong focus on news and current affairs. Uniquely, the service continues to address the needs of first generation Asians, with over 2,000 hours a year of locally originated programmes in a range of South Asian languages. Broadcasting primarily in English to British Asian communities across the UK, the station provides a central point from which audiences can get daily national and international news, sport and music.

Source: BBC Annual report 2002/2003

We have also consistently requested that 1Xtra refrain from supporting artists who have;

- Promoted the ownership of illegal firearms;
- Promoted the ideology of shooting others for money, respect or other misguided reasons;
- Previously engaged in criminal activity and who far from relenting continue to glamorise their criminal past and profit from it;
- Make public statements outside or within their music stating their intention to commit a criminal offence
- Make comments likely to incite a minor to commit a criminal offence; and/or
- Consistently recorded music with violent and/ or misogynistic content?

We ask BBC1Xtra commits to adhering to the above policy.

Although you state that the BBC's commitment to diversity did not start in May 2000 with Greg Dyke's comments, we have been informed by many within the BBC over the past few years that it was Greg Dyke who instigated the corporation wide 'making it happen' transformation. There was a significant shift away from the lethargic and ineffective approach to cultural diversity as previously eschewed by BBC Management, who former Chairman, Gavyn Davies recently described as 'that of a bureaucratic government department' towards a collective will and vision with targets and real commitment. Ultimately, this resulted in increasingly tangible outputs. In this context and with clearly defined goals it is not surprising that the Asian Network, 1Xtra and indeed Radio London's Sunday show for African Britons were commissioned during his tenure. Having said that, these mechanisms still need to be developed and refined if they are to grow and become truly effective.



We would welcome the opportunity to meet with a view to facilitating a constructive discussion with the BBC management team regarding solutions to African British concerns about BBC Radio programming. Please contact us on 020 8986 1984 to arrange a mutually convenient time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Emma Pierre-Joseph', written in a cursive style.

Emma Pierre-Joseph
Media Affairs

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Toyin Agbetu', written in a cursive style.

Toyin Agbetu
Education and Crime Reduction