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SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACT OF BBC COMEDY

FOREWORD



For decades, the BBC has championed British comedy excellence – from Monty Python to The Office, from Fleabag to This Country – yet our focus remains resolutely forward: amplifying diverse voices that reflect the full spectrum of British experiences across our nations and regions.

In a media landscape becoming fast dominated by global streaming giants, BBC Comedy provides something irreplaceable: distinctly British storytelling that connects us to ourselves and projects our values worldwide. When the late Queen Elizabeth II shared tea with Paddington Bear, or Mr Bean performed at the London Olympics, these moments of quintessentially British humour became powerful global ambassadors, demonstrating comedy's unique ability to showcase who we are.

The BBC makes more than twice the amount of original UK comedy than all other broadcasters and streaming services combined. Through television, internet, radio and podcasts, we nurture programming for diverse audiences that commercial entities simply cannot match.

We recognise Channel 4's vital contribution in this space. And more broadly, without public service broadcasting as a whole, the UK's comedy ecosystem would collapse. Together, the public service broadcasters (PSBs) remain the only

genuine champion of comedy talent development – from grassroots initiatives to writer's rooms and pilots. Nearly every British comedy star lighting up screens globally today took their first steps with the BBC or one of the other PSBs.

Yet this ecosystem faces unprecedented challenges. Funding pressures and shifting consumption patterns threaten the very foundations of British comedy. This report makes clear: without decisive action from broadcasters, policymakers, and industry partners, the future of this uniquely British cultural and economic asset hangs in the balance.

Comedy isn't just entertainment – it's woven into the very fabric of our national identity. Laughter is how we process our shared experiences, navigate our differences, and find common ground in divided times. The BBC's role in bringing the country together through comedy is not simply cultural but essential to our collective wellbeing. Reading this report, I urge you to consider what's at stake – and join us in ensuring British comedy not only survives but thrives for generations to come.



Jon Petrie
*Comedy
Commissioning
Director, BBC*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To celebrate the role of British comedy in 2025, this report examines the value of UK comedy to audiences, society and the creative industries as well as the critical role of the BBC as an investor and champion of UK comedy.

It sets out the urgent challenges that are threatening the sector, with a need for the Government and industry to act now to safeguard UK comedy into the future.

Comedy is hugely important to audiences across the UK. It provides light relief and escapism but can also help audiences process complex and polarising subjects. Whether it's rewatching a favourite TV show, or listening to a long-running radio series that forms the soundtrack to someone's life, people return again and again to their favourite comedy programmes, more than any other genre.

British comedy brings people together. Nearly seven in 10 people say that they have talked about British comedy to friends or family; a similar number think that it can offer a reflection of Britain today. Last year's Christmas day episode of *Gavin & Stacey* was a testament to the ability of comedy to create shared moments, becoming one of the most-watched scripted TV shows of the century after being watched by 20.9m viewers in the month after it was first broadcast – nearly a third of the UK's population.

Beyond the vital cultural role of UK comedy it is also a key part of the UK's creative industries, with

both a direct and indirect economic impact. British comedy has substantial UK export value, attracting widespread international audiences: in 2024/25, BBC Studios licensed 13,331 hours of comedy in total – the equivalent of nearly 27,000 half-hour episodes and often well-loved formats are sold and re-made for their international audiences (e.g. *The Office*, *Ghosts*). Research has found that the “unique” and “ironic” British sense of humour is a key reason why young Europeans watch UK-made television shows and films. The international appeal of British comedy is reflected in the level of investment in high end UK comedy by international broadcasters and streamers.

UK comedy employs a wide range of on- and off-screen and -air talent, supporting jobs including production crews, writers, and set designers, as well as post-production suppliers and supporting services such as catering and facilities management. We estimate that UK TV comedy production sector supports around 2,050 jobs. Many more jobs are supported throughout the UK comedy ecosystem, including in audio and live performance.



Nearly **seven in 10 people** say that they have talked about British comedy to friends or family



Seven in 10 people think that British comedy can offer a reflection of Britain today

2,050

The UK TV comedy production sector supports around **2,050 jobs**

2x

The BBC makes over **double the number of original UK comedy hours** than all other broadcasters and streamers combined

£67.1M

The BBC **invested nearly £67.1m in TV comedy in 2024** – more than double the spend from each of the other broadcasters and streamers, including Netflix, Apple TV, and Disney

30

The BBC worked with **30 independent audio producers** in 2024/25

across genres, and in particular comedy, often provide a training ground for nurturing new skills and talent. Some of the UK's most recognised talents started out in comedy, many of whom are now working internationally – such as Jesse Armstrong, Armando Iannucci, Michaela Coel, Daisy May Cooper, Phoebe Waller-Bridge, Charlie Brooker, Richard Curtis, Steve Coogan.

Audio also remains an important part of the comedy pipeline, as the original home of successful TV comedies like *The League of Gentlemen*, *Little Britain*, and *Goodness Gracious Me*, a launchpad for newer talent such as Kat Sadler (creator and executive producer of Bafta-winning *Such Brave Girls*), and providing the starting point for commissioners, producers, and executives now working across the comedy ecosystem.

The BBC sits at the very heart of this ecosystem, providing a home for UK comedy across a wide range of platforms and formats. In TV, we invested nearly £67.1m in comedy in 2024 – far exceeding the investment and volume of first-run UK originated content of other commissioners. In 2024, we estimate that the BBC invested more than double compared to any other broadcaster or streamer and made over twice as many first-run UK-originated comedy hours than everyone else combined.

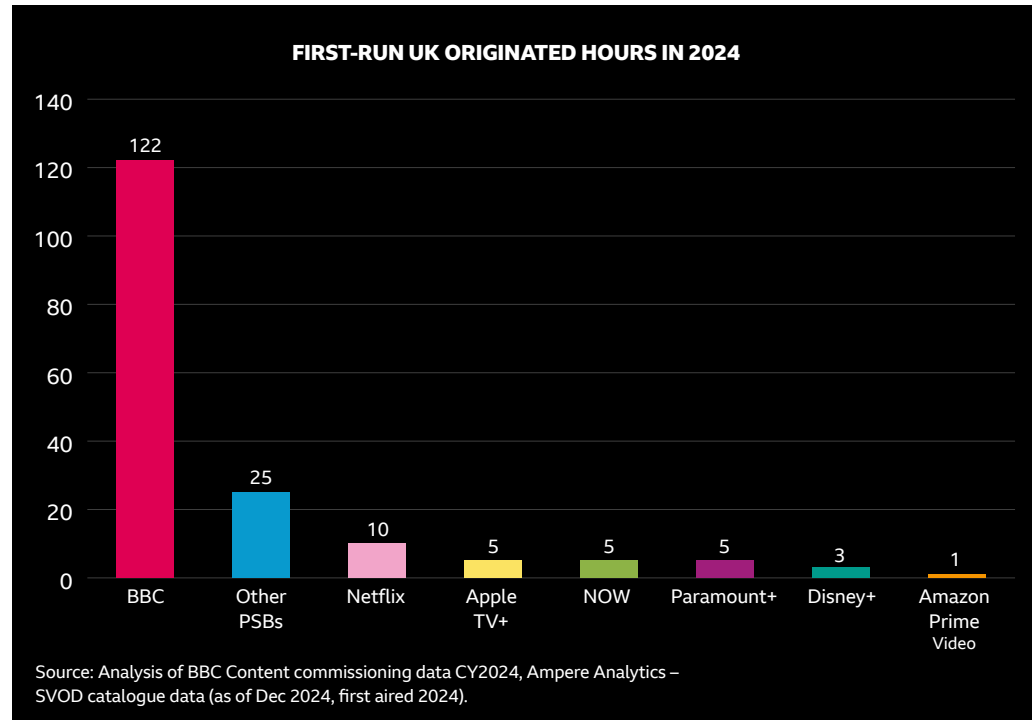
In radio, the BBC is the sole UK provider of broadcasting radio comedy on linear and digital services. In 2024/25, the BBC made 265 hours of audio comedy content, working with 30 independent producers across the UK's nations and regions.

UK audiences value the BBC's distinctive offer citing the volume, range and quality of British comedy available on the BBC. A total of 435 million viewer hours of BBC comedy content were watched in 2024/25 and eight out of 10 of the top performing comedies last year were from the BBC.

The BBC also plays a key role in the comedy development pipeline, working with emerging voices and taking risks to work with people early in their careers. Industry stakeholders often referred to the BBC as the first and only place where they would take new writers. The BBC has schemes specifically aimed at new comedy talent, in particular the BBC New Comedy Awards, BBC Comedy Collective, and BBC Radio Comedy Writers Bursary. There are other routes in audio such as “open door” shows like *DMs Are Open* and *The Skewer*, which anyone can submit material to.

For the BBC, 2025 is an exciting year celebrating British comedy. The next 10 creatives making up the BBC Comedy Collective will be imminently announced at the BBC Comedy Festival in Northern Ireland, we're celebrating 30 years since the BBC New Comedy Award launched, and there is a year of impressive programming ahead, including sitcom *Can You Keep A Secret*, starring Dawn French, and the second series of Bafta-winning comedies *Such Brave Girls* by Kat Sadler and *Dreaming Whilst Black* by Adjani Salmon. In audio, some of the highlights include returning unscripted series *One Person Found This Helpful* starring Frank Skinner and *Unspeakable* with Phil Wang and Susie Dent, sitcoms *Call Jonathan Pie* and *Rum Punch*, and new stand-up chat series *Your Mum* with the award-winning Laura Smyth.

Despite the clear societal and economic value of British comedy the genre faces real jeopardy. Public service broadcasters (PSBs) have been unable to meet rising production costs due to a real-terms reduction in the BBC licence fee, stagnating advertising revenues for commercially-funded PSBs, and greater difficulty in securing third-party funding from distributors. Whilst international investment from streamers has benefited the sector it is limited to the very high-end of the market supporting only a few titles such as *Man v Bee* and *After Life*. Yet the talent pipeline that this part of



the market relies upon depends on the investment of the PSBs, and when streamers acquire PSB commissions after the initial windowing period it is some of their best performing content.

Urgent action is needed from the Government and industry to protect this critical genre. In particular, the BBC is calling on the Government to introduce further support for scripted TV comedy through tax credits – an intervention that is proven to work, incentivising investment in UK content production and at-risk genres. This needs to go beyond high-end comedy to support the full production ecosystem which is such a vital part of British cultural identity. More broadly, the Government should also consider how a well-designed tax

credits system might meet objectives such as incentivising co-production (for example through an uplift to the HETV tax relief), to ensure a future for UK comedy within a thriving mixed media ecology.

Now is the time to act – to ensure that UK audiences can continue to laugh at great British comedy.

1 INTRODUCTION

For over a century, BBC comedy has not just entertained the UK – it has defined it. From the airwaves to screens worldwide, British humour through the BBC has become one of the nation’s most cherished and influential cultural exports.

The comedy ecosystem captures a wide breadth of content types and formats. This includes live performance stand-up and sketch, short-form comedy suitable for the social media era, long-form scripted comedy such as sitcoms, unscripted comedy panel shows made for TV and radio and more conversational comedy podcasts. This offers audiences a wide variety of ways to enjoy comedy, in-person or via screen and audio, from short funny clips to longer programmes. Live performance and increasingly online social media are important for grassroots comedic talent to develop and find an audience. Comedy on TV and audio gives that talent a more prominent platform and opportunity to be discovered by a larger audience.

The BBC plays a critical role in the UK’s comedy ecosystem. We are the largest commissioner of TV and audio comedy, with a significant legacy of long-running radio comedy formats and iconic TV shows. This report focuses on the areas that relate to BBC comedy content – TV, radio and podcasting (Section 3.1 discusses the breadth of the BBC’s offer in more detail).

This report examines the importance of UK comedy for audiences, society and the creative industries and then further examines the critical role played by the BBC to develop emerging comedic talent and support the UK comedy production sector. It sets out the future outlook for the UK comedy sector and concludes with recommendations for the BBC, Government and industry stakeholders to come together to enable the sector to thrive.





Scope and analytical approach

The analysis presented in this report relies on a combination of primary research, desk research and data analysis and has been undertaken in-house by economists and public policy specialists in the BBC Policy and Public Affairs team.

- Primary research from BBC-led stakeholder interviews, with 15 individuals involved in the UK comedy sector.
- Written feedback from individuals working in the UK comedy sector on the impact of BBC comedy talent development and outreach.
- Hearing directly from audiences, with two “Virtual In Person” sessions with audience members focusing on comedy.
- Analysis of content hours and spend data provided by BBC Public Service, and various data published by Ofcom and Ampere Analytics.
- Complementary desk research that included a range of data and reports – including from BBC Audiences, BBC Studios, ONS employment multipliers, and Barb.

Structure of this report

The rest of the report is structured as follows.

- Section 2 explores the value of UK comedy content to audiences and its impact on society.
- Section 3 examines the critical role played by the BBC in the UK comedy sector, both in terms of the BBC’s comedy output and the economic value to the sector.
- Section 4 sets out the outlook for the UK comedy sector and the challenges it currently faces.
- Section 5 concludes with recommendations on how the industry and government should come together to support the UK comedy sector. It then sets out forthcoming BBC’s plans.
- Annex I lists the key stakeholders that were interviewed as part of the BBC’s qualitative research for this study and those that provided us with written feedback on their experiences working with the BBC.

2 VALUE OF UK COMEDY

Laughter is one of the earliest things that we do as babies. It's an expression of joy across all cultures, with multiple studies indicating its physical, psychological, and social benefits.

For example, University of Warwick researchers have set how laughter and humour can alleviate worry, diminish feelings of isolation, and bring people together.¹

Given the importance of laughter, it's no surprise that comedy is often extraordinarily culturally significant, with a long-lasting impact on audiences. Shows can have a long tail as they gain in popularity, attracting audiences long after they were first aired. Old episodes of *Gavin & Stacey*, *Mrs Brown's Boys*, *Not Going Out*, *Inside No. 9*, *Ghosts*, and *Two Doors Down* are some of the most-viewed shows on BBC iPlayer over the last year. And, more than other genres, people return again and again to programmes that can be as or even more compelling when they're rewatched.

Gavin & Stacey, *This Country*, and *Two Doors Down* are among the top-viewed programmes that people watch more than once within a year – for example, 8m BBC iPlayer accounts have repeat watched an episode of *Gavin & Stacey* twice in the last year.

“Comedy that has a big impact has such a long tail... It's almost like putting on a good pair of shoes that really fit you well.”

Louise Thornton, Head of Multiplatform Commissioning, BBC Scotland

This report considers TV and audio comedy specifically. However, we recognise that comedy is much broader than this, from stand-up shows to social media shorts. Many of the benefits outlined in this section will also be true for the comedy ecosystem more broadly.



¹ University of Warwick, [‘Laughter really is the best medicine, research finds’](#), June 2023.

2.1 Importance of UK comedy to audiences and society

“The importance of comedy is there for all to see. What is television for? Much as it’s there to tell stories and highlight things – news and information – there is also an element of escapism that you find in comedy and entertainment, that I think is very important.”

James Corden



Comedy is hugely important to audiences both within and outside the UK. Central to the success of British comedy shows is the distinctive British sense of humour: witty, sarcastic, satirical, occasionally twisted, magnificently eccentric, and yet firmly rooted in the experiences of everyday life. British humour is as much a part of the UK’s cultural export and soft power as music, the monarchy, and Sir David Attenborough himself.

Providing a sense of escapism

“I rely on a lot of comedy programmes to escape to different funny worlds, where things are light-hearted and fun.”

Phil Dunning, *Smoggie Queens* creator, writer and performer

Comedy has the capacity to actively change how viewers are feeling: Radio Times research has found that 22% of viewers reported increased happiness levels after watching comedy.² BBC research has found that four in five people say that British comedy helps them to unwind from the stresses in their life, with its comfort and consistency providing a welcome contrast to the unpredictability that they might experience day-to-day.³ Audiences turn to scripted comedy in all weathers: when they’re feeling relaxed, but also when they are stressed, sad, or unhappy, and looking to move away from that state of mind.



Tackling social issues

With news avoidance on the rise, comedy not only fulfils a need for light relief and escapism, but can help audiences process complex and polarising subjects.⁴ For example, TV shows like *Alma’s Not Normal*, which tackles subjects such as drug addiction and mental health issues, and Radio 4 shows like Laura Smyth’s *I Don’t Know What To Say*, about her breast cancer story and people’s responses to grief, or Scott Agnew’s *Dead Man Talking*, about his extraordinary multiple brushes with death, tell difficult stories with great humanity, helping audiences to process their own difficult experiences and building empathy and understanding.

“It’s really important, seeing world events through a comedic lens... The world is quite mad, and there are other people laughing at it. That’s a reassuring thing, even if what’s being commented on is bleak and unsettling.”

Charlie Brooker

From panel shows to sitcoms, interviewees emphasised the importance of British and Irish comedy in tackling darker themes in irreverent

ways, without making audiences feel like they’re being preached to. There is a sense among audiences that this makes UK comedy distinctive, with US comedy often seen as overly polished and too aspirational compared to the real and relatable themes of British humour.

Reflecting different communities on screen

Our sense of humour is local, shaped by the country or even region, city, or town where someone is from. While today, people can access and enjoy comedy from anywhere in the world, UK audiences still want to see shows that reflect their lives and experiences – and have a sense that no one makes comedy quite like us. Among international audiences, “humour” is the word most associated with UK shows and films, and is appreciated even in programmes that aren’t comedies.⁵

“Having a laugh is a fundamental part of our culture [in the West Midlands]..., it’s brought people together, really broken-down barriers, and really allowed people to get to know each other.”

Guz Khan

There are multiple identities within and across the UK and Ireland, with a need to celebrate what we have in common as well as where and how we diverge. Audiences value comedy both for how it reflects their own lives and worldview back at them, and what it shows them about other people’s lives in ways that are unique compared to other genres. Eight in 10 people say that British comedy features a range of diverse people and cultures, while seven in 10 think that it can offer a reflection of Britain today.⁶ Over half say that British comedy is representative of their lives and area.⁷

² Radio Times Screen Test, quoted in Radio Times, ‘[TV can make you happier, Radio Times study finds](#)’, September 2023.

³ BBC research into the audience value of British comedy, October 2023.

⁴ Reuters Institute, 2024 [Digital News Report](#).

⁵ King’s College London, ‘[Screen Encounters with Britain: What do young Europeans make of Britain and its digital screen culture?](#)’, February 2025.

⁶ BBC research into audience value of British comedy, October 2023.

⁷ Ibid.

“British people want to see British people doing comedy set in Britain.”

Ash Atalla, CEO, Roughcut TV

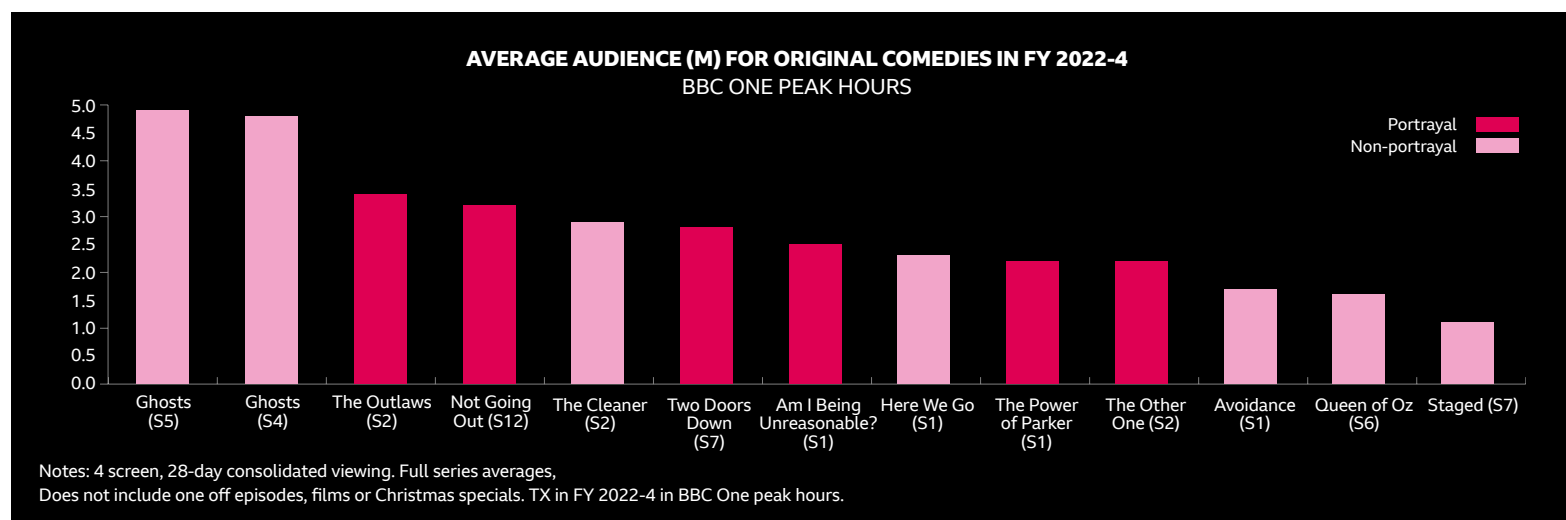
Comedy also has a unique ability to educate audiences about the lives of others – lives that they may never have been interested in watching across other genres, whether that's a small LGBTQ+ community in Middlesbrough (*Smoggie Queens*), a group of teenagers coming of age in 90s Northern Ireland (*Derry Girls*), or a group of working-class amateur musicians in Brentford (*People Just Do Nothing*).⁸ Through changing people's perceptions and breaking down barriers, comedy can bring different communities across the UK closer together.

“The more you have funny stories about lots of different people, the better.”

Audience member, Virtual In Person session

The value that audiences place on seeing shows that portray authentic lives on-screen is illustrated by the performance of titles such as *Only Child* or *Man Like Mobeen*, that are tied to specific locations, reflect a place's landscape, culture, or history, and present experiences that are recognisable and authentic (termed “portrayal” titles for the purposes of our analysis).⁹ These shows perform at least as well as programmes that are less culturally or regionally specific, showing that very specific shows can have universal appeal, beyond just the communities that they show on screen.

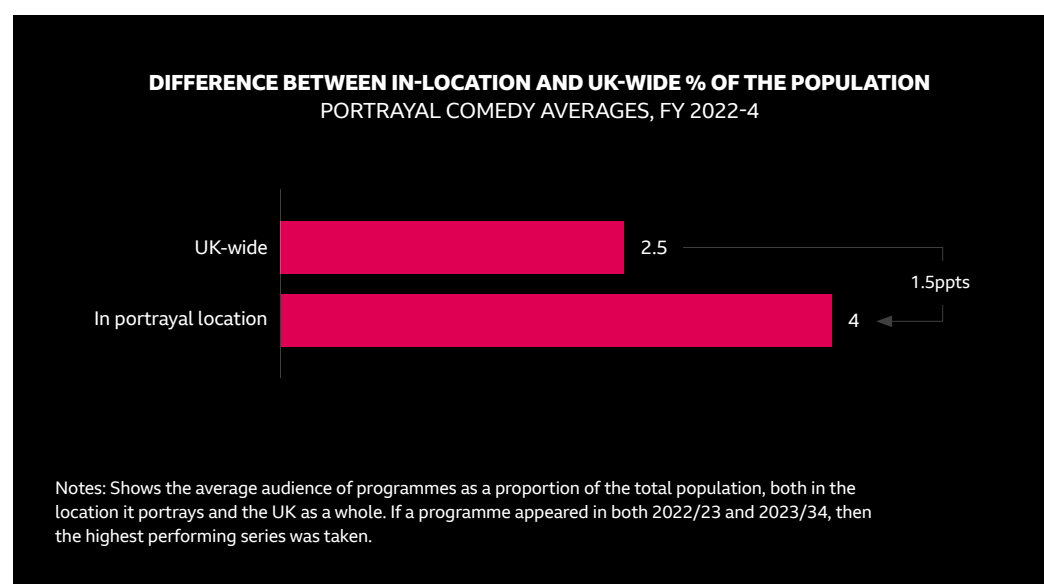
At the same time, BBC research shows that a comedy portrayal title delivers an uplift in viewing in the location that is being portrayed.



For example, *Two Doors Down* – a Scottish sitcom focussing on neighbours living side-by-side in a middle-class Glasgow suburb – averaged over 2.8m viewers per episode in the most recent series and is one of the top comedy titles on BBC iPlayer. The proportion of people in Scotland who watched *Two Doors Down* was 9ppts higher than across the rest of the UK. Also set in Glasgow, *Still Game* had a 4ppt uplift in Scotland. Over 60% of Wales's population watched the *Gavin & Stacey* Christmas Day finale – nearly double compared to 32% of those across the Severn Bridge.¹⁰

“Whether it's Scotland or whether it's a different area or different community, that voice absolutely speaks to where that person is from, where they've grown up, and their reference points.”

Louise Thornton, Head of Multiplatform Commissioning, BBC Scotland.



⁸ Ibid.

⁹ BBC research into portrayal titles, October 2024

¹⁰ Barb data, cited in BBC, 'Figures show over half of Welsh population have watched *Gavin & Stacey: The Finale*', February 2024.



BBC Tiger Aspect Khuram Mirza

Man Like Mobeen

Guz Khan's BBC comedy *Man Like Mobeen* offers a rarely seen insight into working class life as an ethnic minority. The sitcom follows an English Muslim trying to leave behind a life of crime in Birmingham after finding his faith. It has resonated with a young audience, with Series 4 seeing the top 16-34 audience for a BBC Three comedy series since the channel's relaunch (excluding specials). Production company Tiger Aspect's *Man Like Mobeen* New Talent Trainee Scheme ran alongside the third and fourth series of the show and offered paid entry level production jobs to applicants from under-represented backgrounds living in the West Midlands.

"As a Muslim person, I can relate to it. I especially enjoyed how they dropped in a bit of Punjabi and Urdu, and the inside jokes I found absolutely hilarious."

Audience member, Virtual In Person session

In audio comedy, too, audiences value culturally specific content. BBC Radio 4's *Mark Steel's In Town* is one of the top ten most popular comedy shows on BBC Sounds and has seen comedian Mark Steel visit an extraordinary 70 UK towns, research them, and perform a bespoke stand up show about them to a local audience.

2.2 The comedy sector's value to the UK creative industries

Comedy is hugely important to the UK creative industries. Not only is the comedy production sector important in terms of economic value and job creation and as an entry point for new talent before moving into other genres, but British comedy is a significant export from the UK creative industries both financially and for cultural soft power.

UK comedy's export value

One of the most important and distinctive aspects of the UK creative industries exports is the influence of British humour. In 2021 the UK exported £7.7bn of audiovisual goods and services globally, operating a trade surplus.¹¹

"Comedy is one of our biggest cultural exports and it's one that the world understands and that we're exceptionally good at."

Charlie Brooker



CBS Studios

Internationally, British comedy is synonymous with the BBC. This is not only because of the international recognition of the BBC brand, but because many of the British comedy greats have come through the BBC. From *Monty Python* to *Fawlty Towers*, *The News Quiz* to *Have I Got News For You?*, *The Office* to *The Thick of It*, these BBC comedies have won over audiences in both the UK and internationally. Some have even been remade in America. The legacy of BBC comedy draws some of the best comedy talent to want to come and work with the BBC.

British comedy attracts an international audience. In 2024/25, BBC Studios distributed a total of 13,331 hours of BBC commissioned comedy.¹² BBC titles such as *The Outlaws* and *The Cleaner* have performed particularly well overseas, and *Inside No. 9* has continued to perform well, most recently finding an audience in China.

Some UK comedies have been so beloved that they have been reinvented for overseas territories. For the BBC, this includes titles such as *The Office*

and *Ghosts*, the latter of which now has formats in the US (four series with CBS), France, Germany and upcoming Australian and Greek formats in production.

The British sense of humour prevails amongst so much more than sitcoms, sketch or panel shows. It is persistent and reoccurring across almost all UK content, across all genres but particularly drama. A report published by Kings College London found that the "unique" and "ironic" British sense of humour is a key reason why young Europeans watch UK-made television shows and films.¹³

The research found that "humour" is the word most associated with UK shows and films of any genre, not specifically comedy. Furthermore, British humour was a main reason for audiences in Netherlands and Denmark to watch British content (70% and 68% respectively).

¹¹ DCMS Sector Economic Estimates: Trade, 2021

¹² Figures provided by BBC Studios for purposes of this report.

¹³ King's College London, 'Screen Encounters with Britain'.



Economic value of the UK comedy production sector

Comedy production also makes a significant domestic economic impact, whether through direct, indirect, or spillover benefits. Lower-budget or smaller UK-focussed productions across genres, and in particular comedy, often provide a training ground for the skills and talent that then go onto work for larger or higher-budget productions in both comedy and other genres. Some of the UK's most recognised talents started out in comedy, including on both TV and radio – Jesse Armstrong, Armando Iannucci, Michaela Coel, Daisy May Cooper, Phoebe Waller-Bridge, Charlie Brooker, Richard Curtis, Steve Coogan, Rowan Atkinson – many of whom are now working internationally and in a range of genres.

UK originated comedy also supports the UK's production sector, employing on- and off-screen and -air talent and supporting jobs within the wider production sector supply chain. Comedy production not only directly employs talent including production crews, writers, set designers but it also supports post-production suppliers and supporting services such as catering and facilities management.

BBC analysis estimates that the UK comedy TV production sector supports around 2,050 jobs, 45% of which result from content spend from UK PSB's.^{14,15} This does not account for other employment that may be generated more broadly in the comedy sector, including in audio or live performance or through induced effects (i.e. when employees spend their wages on goods and services in the wider UK economy). To our knowledge, there is no further comprehensive evidence on the economic impact of the comedy sector and the number of jobs supported by the comedy production sector alone.

The UK comedy production sector now attracts a significant amount of international investment from global broadcasters and streamers. Whilst their investment in original content tends to be in high-end comedy productions, meaning that the number of UK titles and hours they produce is relatively low (see Section 3.3), they also invest in acquired content, originally commissioned by the PSBs. In the case of Netflix, there is a UK broadcaster title in their top 20 shows every other week.

¹⁴ Based on PSB comedy content spend in CY2023 published in the [Ofcom Connected Nations Interactive Report 2024](#), and BBC analysis of Ampere Analytics Analytics P&L figures; used as a proxy for SVOD catalogue spend.

¹⁵ BBC estimate based on PSB commissioning spend multiplied by [the latest ONS employment multipliers](#), which suggest that 4.085 FTE jobs are supported by every £1m output (revenue) generated within the audiovisual sector (SIC 59). Note, this assumes that PSB commissioning budgets is equivalent to output i.e. comedy commissioning revenues.

3 THE CRITICAL ROLE OF THE BBC IN UK COMEDY

Just like someone's sense of humour is a fundamental part of who they are, comedy is a fundamental part of the BBC – and the BBC in turn is a critical part of the UK's comedy ecosystem

A favourite comedy might be one of the first things that comes to mind when someone thinks about the BBC, whether it's a long-running radio programme like *Just a Minute*, a beloved sitcom like *Mrs Brown's Boys*, a critically-acclaimed BBC Three show like *Dreaming Whilst Black*, or a Friday night stalwart like *Would I Lie To You?*.

“A lot of iconic Radio 4 shows – such as *I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue*, *Hitchhikers Guide to The Galaxy*, *Cabin Pressure* – have been the soundtrack to people's lives, and in many instances they have passed on that love to their children.”

*Julia McKenzie, Commissioning Editor,
Comedy & Entertainment, BBC Radio 4*

The BBC is also a central pillar of the comedy production sector. As the largest commissioner of first-run UK content, our investment is critical for sustaining the industry, including building the talent pipeline by investing in new and emerging voices in a way that no one else does.



BBC Owl Power Jonathan Jakob



3.1 The BBC's approach to comedy and our content offer

Comedy has always been a central part of the BBC's offer. Comedy first appeared on BBC radio in November 1922, when the title song from the musical comedy *Irene* was broadcast in Kiddies' Corner on the BBC's "2ZY" station from Manchester. Since then, it has appeared on the BBC's early experimental low-definition television service and has remained a much-loved part of the BBC's offer on radio, television and online.

Bringing comedy to audiences through a wide range of platforms

Comedy remains perennial across the multitude of BBC public services, including multiple TV channels, BBC iPlayer, radio stations, and BBC Sounds, and available through a wide range of comedy output and formats, across both scripted and unscripted – from *Gavin & Stacey* and *Alma's Not Normal* to *Would I Lie To You?* and *Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing*.

This breadth allows the BBC to serve different audiences with different types of comedy content, build a talent pipeline, and offer comedians different opportunities and experiences – without creatives competing for just one or two primetime TV slots.

The BBC is the only UK brand in the top five media platforms most used by 16-34 year olds.¹⁶ We want to ensure that UK PSB stays a regular part of the media diet for the majority of the UK's young people, with comedy an important genre for UK broadcasters to reach these audiences. For example, BBC Three is the BBC's youngest-skewing channel,¹⁷ while in audio, we are aiming to reach younger audiences through BBC Sounds-only podcast commissions and acquisitions in the comedy and entertainment space.

There is collaboration, including some co-commissioning, between BBC TV and radio. Many shows have transitioned from radio to TV, including *On The Hour* (which became *The Day Today*), *Miranda Hart's Joke Shop* (which became *Miranda*), *On The Town with the League of Gentlemen*, *Goodness Gracious Me*, *Little Britain*, *The Mighty Boosh*, and *Ladhood*. This was identified by stakeholders as an area where there could be further integration and cross-pollination between teams, to better support talent development.

Unlike other commissioners, the BBC's regulatory framework explicitly requires the BBC to provide comedy programming across our online, television, and radio services. We take this role seriously: for example, in FY24/25, we committed to broadcast 2,400 hours of comedy programming on TV and iPlayer, but achieved 2,582 hours. This included 1,226 hours broadcast on TV and 1,355 hours available on iPlayer.¹⁸ Similarly, BBC Radio and Sounds (excluding Radio 4 Extra) broadcast 402 hours of comedy programming, with 265 hours being first run. Radio 4 Extra delivered an additional 1,482 hours of classic comedy from the BBC's archive.

BBC comedy breaks new talent like no one else

Our Annual Plan for 2025/26 sets out how BBC Comedy will continue to showcase a wide range of homegrown shows for all audiences, nurturing and developing new voices as well as collaborating with the most established household names, such as Dawn French, Lee Mack, Rob Brydon, Sharon Horgan and Joanna Lumley.

Comedy is a craft, and it can take time for someone's voice to develop. While comedy shows often have long-lasting impact and develop loyal followings, they might also need space to hit their stride. Stakeholders highlighted the culture of trust between BBC Comedy and creatives, with the BBC providing both creative freedom and support.

Other commissioners working in audiovisual and audio comedy tend to focus on established talent, with the BBC felt to be the only commissioner working with new talent at scale. The BBC has a number of routes for discovering and working with comedy talent, both on- and off-screen and in audio.

"The BBC is the first call you make if you are trying to break new talent."

Ash Atalla, CEO, Roughcut TV

The BBC's commitment to discovering and developing new comedy talent has a heavy influence on the BBC's approach, as set out in more detail in Section 3.4.

¹⁶ Compass by Ipsos UK, based on 15-minute accumulated average weekly reach (on-platform), cited in BBC Group [Annual Report and Accounts](#) 2023/24.

¹⁷ BBC Audiences data.

¹⁸ This will be published in the BBC's Delivering our Mission and Public Purposes report in July 2025.

3.2 Importance of BBC comedy to audiences

As outlined in section 2, UK comedy is hugely important to UK audiences. The BBC is central to delivering this content, with the BBC ranked the highest when it comes to delivering impactful British comedy compared to other commissioners. UK audiences' demand for BBC comedy is strong, with UK audiences watching a total 296 million viewer hours of BBC first-run comedy content in 2024/25. This is an increase of 61% in viewing hours from 2023/24.¹⁹ Comedy punches above its weight, particularly among young audiences: in 2024/25, comedy accounted for 4% of hours across all genres available on BBC iPlayer, but represented 7% of viewer hours across all ages, rising to 11% among audiences aged 16-35.



BBC as a home for UK comedy

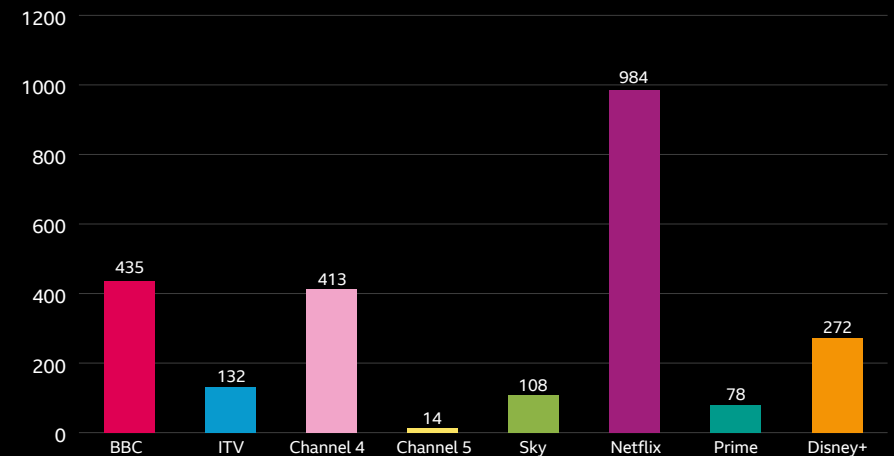
The BBC invests more in original British creativity than anyone else, giving audiences a greater volume and range of new and original UK comedy content than any other provider. Our obligation to be universal means that we must provide something for everyone, across all our services, rather than only targeting profitable parts of the market and ignoring others.

Last year, more people watched BBC comedy content than almost any other provider, with total UK audience consumption of BBC comedy in 2024/25 totalling 435m viewing hours.²⁰

While Netflix saw a higher number of viewing hours overall, viewers often enjoy US-focused series on the service, with older shows such as *Friends*, *The Office (US)*, *The Big Bang Theory*, and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* consistently among Netflix's top-streamed shows.²¹ In fact, comedy content is what drives Netflix viewing overall, with their top 3 titles all comedies.

By contrast, BBC iPlayer gives audiences access to a huge catalogue of old and new content from across the whole of the UK. Without the BBC, there would be very few new UK-originated comedy programmes for audiences to enjoy, noting that the BBC made over double the number of first-run UK originated comedy hours in 2024 than all other providers combined (including the UK PSBs and SVODs like Netflix, Disney+, Apple TV+, and Amazon Prime Video).²² And, as BBC-commissioned content is often licensed to streamers after first appearing on the BBC, fewer BBC shows would impact audience choice across all platforms, not just our own channels and iPlayer. A third of Netflix's best performing acquisitions are UK comedies commissioned by PSBs, including *Friday Night Dinner*, *Benidorm*, *Still Game*, *Motherland*, *Outnumbered* and *Derry Girls*.

TOTAL VIEWING (MILLION HOURS) FOR COMEDY



Source: BBC Analysis of BARB – TechEdge – As Viewed (Programme). Across all broadcaster channels and subscription video on-demand services measured on TV devices for parity. Channel 5 does not include non-Channel 5 branded Paramount channels

“BBC iPlayer’s got more British comedies than any of the others, and they’re generally better quality”

Audience member, Virtual In Person session

Bringing people together

The BBC’s mission is to serve all audiences, and we aim to reach everyone, including by connecting people to unmissable content. Our ability to reach all audiences is unparalleled compared to other UK media providers: in 2023/24, over 95% of UK adults used our services on average each month.²³

Comedy plays an important role in this. 69% of audiences say that they have talked about British comedy to friends or family, while half say that British comedy can make them feel more connected to others in society.²⁴ For example, last year’s Christmas day episode of *Gavin & Stacey* became one of the most-watched scripted TV shows of the century after being seen by 20.9m viewers in the month after it was first broadcast – a testament to the power of British storytelling and the ability of comedy to bring people together.²⁵ 4.6m of those viewers were aged 16-34, the highest young audience for a scripted show since current records began in 2002.

¹⁹ BBC Audiences data.

²⁰ BBC Analysis of Barb – TechEdge – As Viewed (Programme).

²¹ See YouGov, ‘The most-streamed TV in the UK’. Top shows in February 2025 were *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-2019), *Friends* (1994-2004), *The Office (US)* (2005-2013), and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* (2013-2021).

²² Analysis of BBC Content commissioning data CY2024, Ampere Analytics – SVOD catalogue data (as of Dec 2024, first aired 2024).

²³ BBC Group Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24.

²⁴ BBC research into audience value of British comedy.

²⁵ Barb 28 Day As Viewed.



Gavin & Stacey

Sitcom *Gavin & Stacey*, first aired in 2007, focusses on the long-distance relationship between Gavin from Billericay and Stacey from Barry. Over its three series and three specials, it has won a number of awards including multiple Baftas. In 2020, the series won the Impact Award at the National Television Awards. The 2024 Christmas Day special got an astonishing 20.9m viewers after 28 days, breaking its own record set in 2019, when the Christmas special reached 18.5m viewers in 28 days.

In the UK last year, the BBC had eight of the top 10 scripted comedies by highest episode, including the *Gavin & Stacey* Christmas special (20.9m viewers), *Ludwig* (9.5m), and the *Mrs Brown's Boys* Christmas special (5.6m).²⁶ The top comedy for any other provider was Netflix's *A Man on the Inside*, which had an audience of 2.6m – behind on-demand only figures for the BBC's *Gavin & Stacey* Christmas special (9.4m), *Ludwig* (5.5m), the *Outnumbered* Christmas special (3.9m), and *Amandaland* (4.3m). In 2023/24, the BBC had nine of the top 10 scripted comedies.

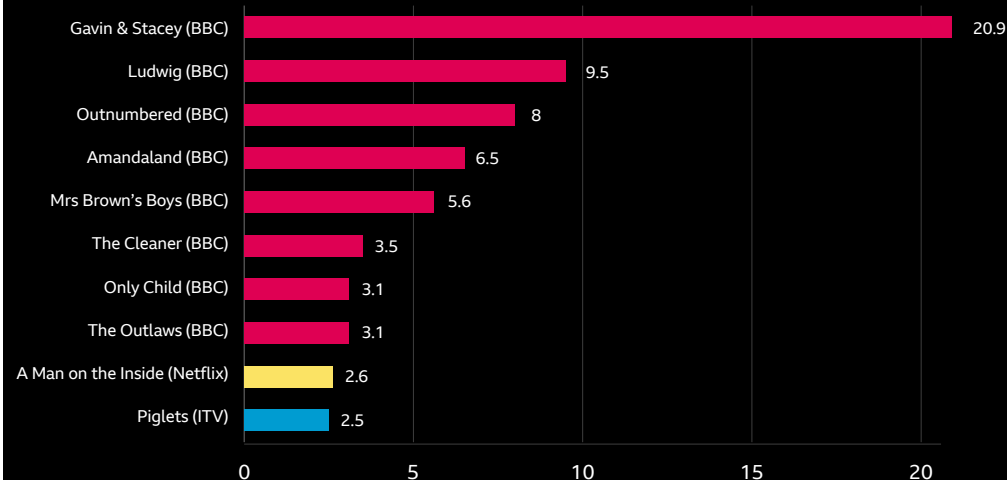
BBC comedy entertainment shows also perform strongly: for example, *Michael McIntyre's Big Show* is one of the biggest entertainment series in the market, averaging 5.9m viewers per episode, the 2024 *Would I Like To You?* Christmas Day special got 4.5m views, and *Have I Got News For You* remains a strong brand well into its 68th series, averaging 4.3m views per episode.²⁷

Portrayal

The BBC is focussed on commissioning homegrown content from across the UK, and by 2026, we expect to exceed our target of 60% of TV production being outside of London.

Comedy supports the BBC to fulfil our universality obligation, with the range of our content helping us to reach a wide and diverse range of people. It can cut through to audiences that tend to be more difficult to reach: for example, in 2024/25, audiences aged 16-34 watched 79% more BBC comedy than the previous year.²⁸

2024 TOP 10 SCRIPTED COMEDIES (MILLIONS)



Source: Barb 28 Day As Viewed.

"We try and represent as much of the population as we can... [It's the] BBC reflecting British life back to the audience."

Julia McKenzie, Commissioning Editor, Comedy & Entertainment, BBC Radio 4

As outlined in section 2, authentic portrayal is not just important for the communities who see themselves recognised on screen but for all audiences. People value seeing lives completely different to their own and feel that comedies set in specific locations give them a good sense of what a place and its people are like through their unique sense of humour.

At the same time, audiences value seeing their lives reflected on screen

"With comedy, especially with BBC comedy, it allows you to have an insight into pockets of the UK and its subcultures and communities."

Dhanny Joshi, Managing Director, Big Deal Films

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ BBC Audiences data.



Smoggie Queens

Smoggie Queens is a sitcom centred around a gang of friends who are fiercely proud of their North Eastern town of Middlesborough and their small pocket of the LGBTQ+ community. The series was written and created by and stars Middlesborough native Phil Dunning. It recently won Best Comedy at the RTS (Royal Television Society) North East Awards, where Dunning also won Best Newcomer.

“I’m so proud to see the place portrayed positively in something that will have reach outside of our region. It’s fantastic to hear our accent on TV, it’s like being surrounded by your mates!”

Audience member

In audio comedy too, the BBC is committed to speaking to a diverse range of audiences – from Geoff Norcott’s *Working Man’s Club*, giving audiences a male working-class perspective, to *Rum Punch*, a sitcom about a family running a Caribbean restaurant in Lewisham, to Jim Smith’s tales of being a Perthshire farmer in *Me and the Farmer*, to *Jessica Fostekew: Sturdy Girl Club*, about the world of women’s weightlifting.

3.3 Importance of BBC comedy investment to the sector

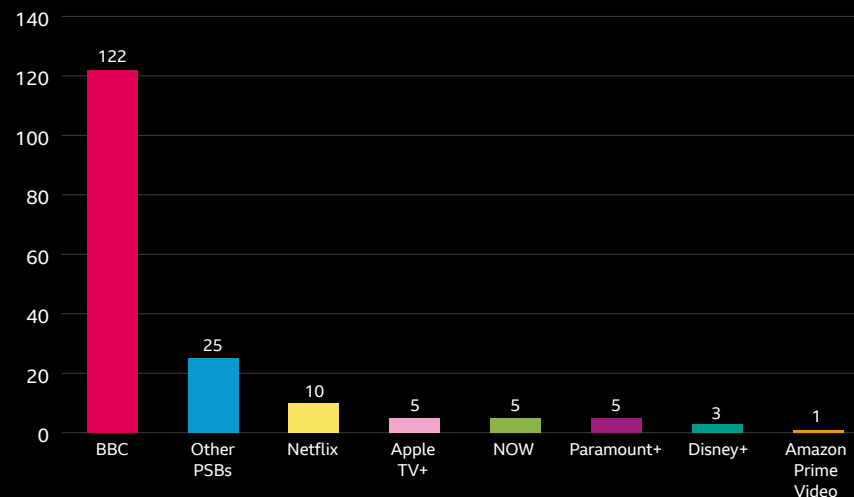
“The BBC’s investment [is] crucial for the sustainability of British comedy.”

Dhanny Joshi, Managing Director, Big Deal Films

The BBC is the largest commissioner of UK first-run comedy, and this investment is critical for sustaining the UK comedy sector. Our analysis finds that that BBC network accounts for more than 75% of PSB spend on first-run TV comedy since 2021.²⁹ Over the same period, almost 80% of PSB first-run comedy hours are attributable to BBC network commissioning.

Despite the growth of international streamers, the BBC far exceeds their investment and volumes of first-run UK originated comedy.

FIRST-RUN UK ORIGINATED HOURS IN 2024



Source: Analysis of BBC Content commissioning data CY2024, Ampere Analytics – SVOD catalogue data (as of Dec 2024, first aired 2024).

In 2024, the BBC aired more than 10 times more hours of first-run UK-originated comedy than Netflix.³⁰ BBC aired 121.8 first-run comedy hours (including 99.2 hours on BBC network channels) compared to 10 hours on Netflix (first aired in CY2024, as of December 2024) and 5 hours each for NOW (Sky), Apple TV+ and Paramount+.³¹

BBC network invested £67.1m in TV comedy in 2024. This is more than double BBC estimates of comedy spend from the largest SVOD commissioners, Netflix, Apple TV+ and Disney.^{32,33}

²⁹ Comparison of BBC network first-run comedy spend from BBC Content data and PSB first run comedy spend published in [Ofcom Connected Nations Interactive Report 2024](#) for 2021, 2022 and 2023. BBC spend exceeded 75% PSB spend in 2021 (84.0%), 2022 (76.1%) and 2023 (76.2%).

³⁰ Based on BBC analysis of BBC network first-run comedy data for CY2024 compared to Ampere Analytics – SVOD catalogue data, as of December 2024 and first aired 2024.

³¹ Based on BBC analysis of BBC network first-run comedy data for CY2024 compared to Ampere Analytics – SVOD catalogue data, as of December 2024 and first aired 2024.

³² BBC estimate of SVOD first-run comedy spend is based on Ampere Analytical P&L figures for 2024 (accessed March 2024), filtered by TV seasons of comedy originals and produced in the UK.

³³ BBC estimates of SVOD UK comedy spend are expected to represent overall comedy investment in UK content – not solely first run. However, they are used here as a comparison to BBC network first-run comedy spend which is smaller than BBC total comedy spend, which should include non-network commissioning and any BBC acquisitions or rights for archive content.

Moreover, the BBC plays a key role in the comedy development pipeline in terms of breaking new talent and developing the independent production sector in view to creating sustainable careers and help the ecosystem thrive. Section 3.4 explores this in more depth. The BBC's sector development generates positive spillovers for other commissioners, who provide less hands-on training and tend to work more with experienced talent.

Taking creative risks and supporting content innovation

"The BBC has a more trusting and free hand... [As a commissioner, it] is more light touch in its editorial."

Ash Atalla, CEO, Roughcut TV

In our primary research with industry stakeholders, interviewees noted that the BBC takes creative risks and places trust in comedy talent to create shows rather than trying to shape programmes according to preconceived notions of what will work. Not only does this make working with BBC attractive to new and established talent, but they also noted the commitment and patience to allow formats to develop without editorial interference. Ultimately, taking these creative risks benefits BBC audiences and the wider comedy industry where this innovation in comedy is less likely to occur.

"When the Beeb believes in something – like with *Amandaland* – there was a lot of faith that we would get it right. At the same time, it wasn't an easy process. But the BBC stuck with us and allowed us all those teething problems and continued to support us by making sure they commissioned the second season really quickly."

Sharon Horgan

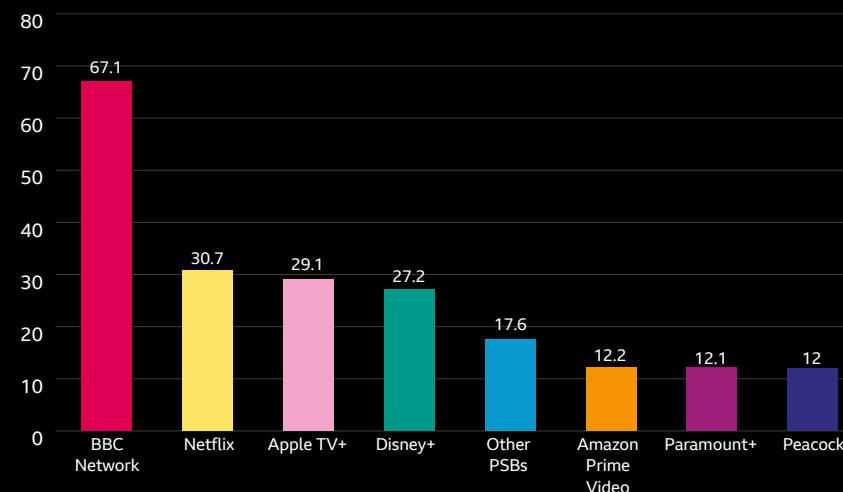
Investing in the creation of valuable British IP

Often BBC commissioned content has further onward commercial value. A substantial amount of BBC commissioned comedy is distributed to other broadcasters and streamers, across different territories and after debuting on the BBC. In 2024/25 alone, BBC Studios licensed 13,331 comedy hours.³⁴ Whilst distribution generates commercial value for rights holders, including the BBC and independent production companies, it also creates commercial returns for third-party rights holders who use BBC content to bolster their content catalogue.

"There's been an extraordinary tradition of British sitcom and we have an entire channel [U&Gold] built around it... classic British comedies from the BBC, and they are enormously popular."

Richard Watsham, Creative Officer, UKTV

UK COMEDY ORIGINAL CONTENT SPEND, £m ESTIMATES
(excludes Sky and commercial UK broadcasters)



Note: assumes 2024 first-run content spend for other PSBs to equal 2023 figure.

Source: Analysis of BBC Content commissioning data (BBC network channels only; non-network comedy commissioning spend excluded from the analysis), Ofcom Connected Nations Report 2024, Ampere Analytics. Streamer first-run spend estimates based on Ampere Analytics P&L figures (accessed 4 April 2024); filtered for comedy genre, original, TV season, and UK as country of production.

³⁴ BBC Studios data.

BBC original comedy content features predominantly as part of two UKTV³⁵ channels; U&Gold, a channel dedicated to celebrating the best of British comedy and BBC classics such as *Dad's Army*, *Only Fools & Horses*, and *Keeping Up Appearances*, and U&Dave, that brought together 21st century comedy acquisitions – predominantly BBC non-scripted titles such as *QI*, *Have I Go News for You?* and *Live at the Apollo*. UKTV is a commercial investor in British creativity, in particular comedy where its proposition combines both BBC archive content along with UKTV's own original, such as comedy quizzes *Hypothetical* and *Mel Giedroyc: Unforgivable*, and sitcoms such as *Meet the Richardsons*.

Supporting UK comedy indies

BBC TV network commissioning provides significant support for the independent production sector. Almost 90% of BBC spend for the first-run comedy aired on BBC network TV channels was spent with external producers, of which 69.3% came from qualifying indies (companies not tied to a UK broadcaster through significant shareholder ownership). This is broadly in line with the total number of first-run hours and distinct titles that come from qualifying and non-qualifying producers.

“BBC Comedy nurtured us as a small company and gave us opportunities to elevate our ideas and instincts.”

Dhanny Joshi, Managing Director, Big Deal Films

The BBC worked closely with Big Deal Films, who were a recipient of the BBC's Small Indie Fund, on a drama comedy during their first TV pilot. BBC Comedy then awarded Big Deal Films their first series commission for *Dreaming Whilst Black*. The pilot won a Bafta for emerging talent in 2022 and the Royal Television Society's 2022 Breakthrough Award.

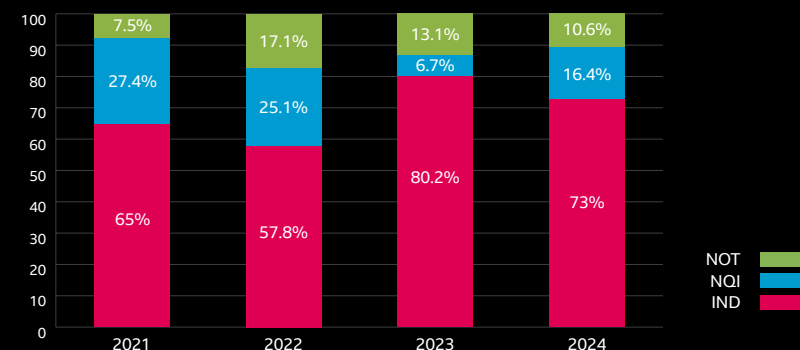
Supporting UK sitcoms

A significant amount of the BBC's comedy output is TV sitcom, a sub-genre of scripted comedy. Many of BBC's best performing comedy titles in 2024/25 were sitcoms, with the top 10 comedy series including *Amandaland* which was viewed by 5.3m and *Mrs Brown's Boys Specials* by 4.7m.³⁶

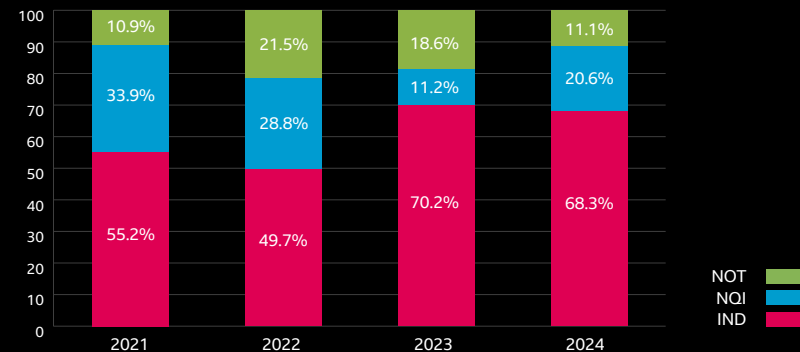
Around 50% of BBC first-run hours on BBC network comedy content are scripted comedy, yet this represents approximately 70% of first-run comedy commissioning cost.³⁷ This reflects higher production cost for scripted comedy, which is discussed in more detail in Section 4.

Although BBC first-run comedy spend has been broadly the same since 2021, there has been a decline in the number of first-run hours and titles commissioned by the BBC. In other words, increased production costs, coupled with the BBC not being able to increase first-run comedy budgets in line with other commissioners due to a below inflation licence fee settlement, has resulted in fewer first-run hours and titles.

BBC FIRST-RUN TV HOURS BY PRODUCER TYPE (%)



BBC FIRST-RUN TV SPEND BY PRODUCER TYPE (%)



Source: BBC Content commissioning data for BBC network titles.

Notes: BBC network only; used for comparison as BBC non-network spend not available. Ofcom definitions for comedy (includes sitcom and comedy-other) and external producer definitions. 'IND' refers to qualifying independent production companies; those that are not tied to a UK broadcaster through significant common ownership. 'NOI' are non-qualifying independent production companies that have a tie to UK broadcaster through more than 25% stakeholder ownership

³⁵ UKTV is an ad-funded British multichannel broadcaster, which is wholly owned by BBC Studios, a commercial subsidiary of the BBC public service.

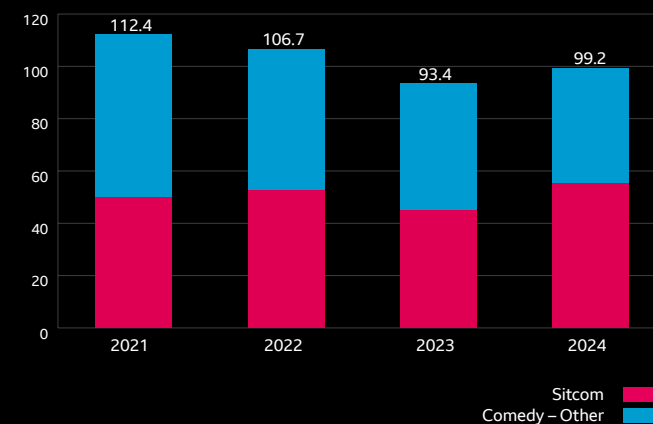
³⁶ BARB 4 Screen, based on 28-day performance across TV and iPlayer.

³⁷ Based on analysis of BBC network first-run comedy commissioning data, aired CY2021 to CY2024.

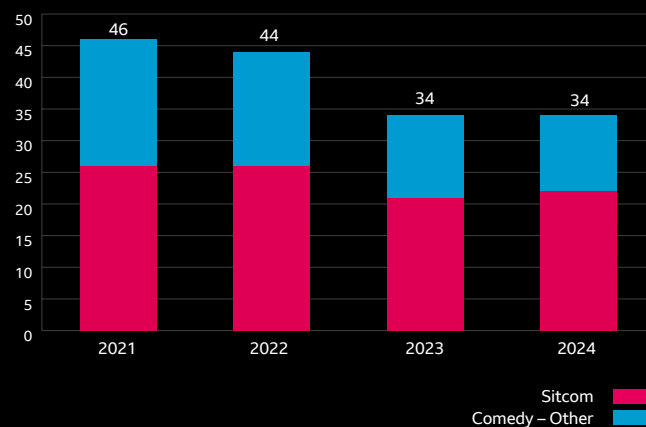
Other comedy, as defined by Ofcom, includes other scripted comedy and unscripted comedy. Other scripted comedy titles, that are not classified as sitcom, include *Cunk On Life Special* was viewed by 2.1m,³⁸ sketch show *Lazy Susan*, and BBC Three's short-form comedy such as *I Am Darren* and *Maneater*. Unscripted comedy captures a breadth of other comedy content such as comedy panel shows like *Have I Got News For You?*, recorded live stand-up *Live At The Apollo*, and satirical comedy *Frankie Boyle's New World Order*. Other comedy titles represent around 20-30% of BBC first run comedy spend, but account for more than 40% of first-run comedy hours.



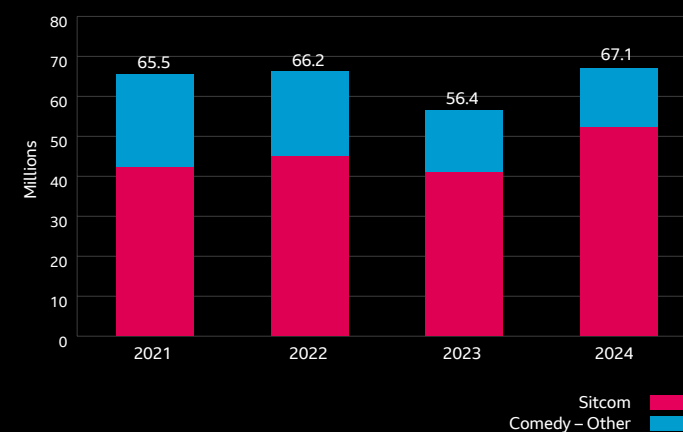
BBC COMEDY – FIRST RUN HOURS



BBC COMEDY – FIRST RUN NO. TITLES



BBC COMEDY – FIRST RUN COST



Source: BBC Content commissioning data for BBC network titles

³⁸ BARB 4 Screen, based on 28-day performance across TV and iPlayer.



BBC & audio comedy production sector

The BBC is the sole provider of broadcasting radio comedy on linear and digital services.³⁹ Radio comedy primarily appears on BBC Radio 4 and BBC Radio 4 Extra, a digital-only sister station that mostly airs archived repeats. This unique radio offer reflects the BBC's broadcaster heritage and has a dedicated audience, with Radio 4 comedy reaching many millions of listeners each week. Over time, the BBC audio offer has evolved, with comedy appearing on BBC 5Live – notably *The Elis James and John Robins Show* – and BBC Sounds, the BBC's audio streaming service that includes live radio broadcasts, on-demand shows, and acquisitions.

BBC Sounds on-demand content has expanded to include new podcast-only content, such as *Miss Me* and *Evil Genius*, that is distinct from BBC radio content. The latter is often repackaged into on-demand programming and podcasts for BBC Sounds and third-party podcast listening, which includes extended episodes for some programmes. The majority of BBC on-demand audio content is distributed onto third-party platforms such as Spotify and Apple Podcasts. Friday Night Comedy from BBC Radio 4 is consistently in the top 10 on-demand programmes for listeners of all ages – for example, it was the 9th biggest on-demand radio programme on Sounds in Q4 2024; 7th for 16-34s.⁴⁰

In 2024/25, the BBC made 265 hours of audio comedy content, including long-running legacy shows, newer returning series, and brand new work.

We worked with 30 independent producers across the UK – including the North East, North West, and South East of England, London, Scotland,

and Northern Ireland. The BBC also supports audio comedy producers through the Radio Indie Development Fund.

Audio is the place where many comics and comedy writers learn their craft and find their voice. BBC radio has long been a launchpad for careers, and was the original home of successful TV comedies like *The League of Gentlemen*, *Little Britain*, *Goodness Gracious Me*, *The Mighty Boosh* and *That Mitchell and Webb Look*. Unscripted radio formats have also successfully moved to TV, such as BBC Scotland's topical comedy panel show *Breaking the News*, which recently aired its fourteenth TV series after originally starting as a radio show.

“I’m incredibly excited at the possibility of what the audio route can lead to.”

Sharon Horgan

BBC radio remains an important pipeline for emerging comedy writers, offering both “open door” shows such as *DMs Are Open* and *The Skewer*, and funded staff comedy writer jobs within BBC Studios Audio.

Audio is also an important pipeline for comedy producers, as the place where they learn a range of skills – because the small teams involved in radio means that producers must act as editor, director, and producer. Decisionmakers across the comedy ecosystem got their start in audio comedy, from commissioners at multiple broadcasters to executives at a number of TV production companies.

³⁹ There are several UK online-only radio stations that have a large portion of comedy output, such as Pumpkin FM's Britcom stations and ROKiT Radio Network's Comedy Gold and American Comedy stations.

⁴⁰ [BBC Sound performance Quarter 4 2024 performance](#), 2025.

3.4 Importance of BBC investment in training and skills

The BBC is unique in its commitment to nurturing comedy talent and developing sustainable careers in the comedy production sector, both on-screen and off-screen. This section explores how the BBC Comedy commissioning team engages with talent and the opportunities offered to support careers both in-front and behind the camera.

“The BBC has got this incredible knack of cultivating talent... When you’re starting out, you look at what has gone before... all the people you love and want to emulate have a footprint in the BBC.”

James Corden

The BBC is strongly committed to discovering and nurturing new comedy talent. This is reflected through more established talent opportunities and more generally how BBC commissioners engage with comedy writers and producers. While social media and podcasting offer new ways for comics to connect with audiences, a BBC credit and the support and experience that accompany it can be significant in establishing a career.

“Working with the BBC has changed my career trajectory.”

Phil Dunning, Smoggie Queens creator, writer and performer

Approach to breaking new talent

The BBC is widely recognised as backing emerging talent and taking risks to work with people early in their career.



Amongst our interviewees, the BBC was often referred to as the first and only place that would take new writers – with recent series by debut TV writers including Kat Sadler’s *Such Brave Girls*, Lucia Keskin’s *Things You Should Have Done*, Phil Dunning’s *Smoggie Queens*, and Ryan Dylan and Rian Lennon’s *Funboys*.

“The BBC is rare in this climate to be backing newer writers... The BBC back very, very young writers or people very early in their career.”

Nerys Evans, Creative Director, Scripted, Expectation TV

This was attributed to the unique funding model that means that the BBC can take more risks on emerging talent rather than requiring commissioning decisions to be based on commercial incentives, such as advertising revenues or requiring established talent with international appeal.

This is partly reflected in the BBC’s decision to ringfence its development budget. There are several different avenues of comedy development – from scripts, readthroughs, radio, short films, pilots to tasters – that allow the BBC to tailor make an approach for different talent. This allows BBC commissioners to engage early with writers and producers to develop projects by offering both financial support and creative input.

The hands-on approach to talent development is accompanied by an openness to engage with and steer new talent. This is further supported by the breadth of BBC services that provide a pipeline for both comedy talent and their shows to move across as they become more successful. For example, the first series of *Gavin & Stacey* was commissioned by BBC Three, with the second series airing on BBC Two. Similarly, *Newsnight with Charlie Brooker* was first aired on BBC Four in 2009. Over time the format evolved and was aired on BBC Two show *Charlie Brooker’s Weekly Wipe*, appearing for three series from 2012 to 2025.

“The BBC has the infrastructure... you start really in short form and then you can go to BBC Three, BBC Two and BBC One.”

Ash Atalla, CEO, Roughcut TV

“There’s a feeder pipeline [for comedy at the BBC]. Certainly my shows, the ‘Wipes’, started out on BBC Four with a budget of like 15 pence. And then we graduated to BBC Two as we built a following.”

Charlie Brooker

Beyond just scripted comedy programmes, other TV entertainment also provides a platform for newer and up-and-coming talent. For example, long-running Bafta-nominated BBC Two series *Live At The Apollo* welcomes both established talent and fresh faces to the stage, introducing them to new audiences. The latest series has featured comedians such as Dan Tiernan (winner of the 2022 BBC New Comedy Award) and Ania Magliano (nominated for the Sky Arts Breakthrough Award in 2024).

The BBC’s audio services are also important when it comes to developing new talent. For many performers, BBC radio might be their first opportunity to adapt their live stand-up from playing small clubs to reaching an audience of hundreds of thousands – for example, Sophie Willan’s *Guide to Normality*, Bridgit Christie’s *Mind The Gap*, or Mae Martin’s *Guide to 21st Century Sexuality*. Writers such as Kat Sadler (*Such Brave Girls*), Andy Wolton (*Trying*), and Tony Roche (*Back, The Thick Of It*) all started their careers in BBC Radio Comedy. As well as developing their scriptwriting skills, audio comedy might be the first place that someone works with a producer and learns to take notes.

The BBC has other talent development and outreach for emerging talent when it comes to audio comedy. For example, Radio 4’s topical sketch show *DMs Are Open* and multi-award winning satirical comedy *The Skewer* are both “open door”, meaning that any writer can pitch ideas for the show.

Additionally, BBC Scotland commissioning has two online platforms that showcase new and emerging Scottish comedy. *The Social*, the BBC Scotland’s award-winning digital platform that develops creative talent from around Scotland, and *Short Stuff*, a platform to amplify comedy sketches from comedy talent based in Scotland. For example, Ashley Storrie engaged with the BBC through *Short Stuff* – performing the sketch *If Games of Thrones was Scottish* in 2017 – and through her own BBC Radio Scotland show in the Friday night 10pm slot. More recently, Storrie co-created and starred *Dinosaur*, a co-commission between BBC Comedy, BBC Scotland and Hulu, and Radio 4 comedy show, *What’s the Story, Ashley Storrie?*.

BBC comedy talent schemes

As part of our commitment to backing homegrown storytelling and simplifying and strengthening our talent schemes, the BBC recently launched a new [Talent and Skills Opportunities website](#). It brings together well over a hundred schemes and initiatives from across the BBC under four headings: Content Creating, Writing, Performing, and Journalism.

The BBC has several formal schemes that are aimed at discovering and developing emerging writers and other comedy talent specifically. The primary routes for the BBC to discover and develop new comedy talent are through the BBC New Comedy Awards and the BBC Comedy Collective. These are both discussed in detailed case studies.

BBC radio and podcasting are also key routes for talent development, particularly for script writing. Each year, the BBC Radio Comedy Writers Bursary supports at least two young writers and employs them on a six-month contract to write and script-edit shows across BBC Studios Audio.



This includes *The News Quiz* and *Dead Ringers* as well as sketch and sitcoms whilst also encouraging recipients to develop their own formats and shows. Bursary recipients have included Kat Sadler, who went onto writing credits for scripted and factual entertainment shows on BBC One, ITV and Channel 4 before her own show *Such Brave Girls* was commissioned for BBC Three, and Andy Wolton, who went on to write *Trying*, Apple TV's first ever British scripted original.

In 2023-24, £55k was allocated as part of 12 BBC Comedy Grants to support inclusion and development projects across the UK for people who are passionate about comedy. The grants support groups, organisations or charities that provide opportunities and creative access for underrepresented groups in the UK comedy sector.

A BBC Comedy Grant helped organisation Funny Women to launch "The Glitter Project" at the 2024 Edinburgh Fringe. The grant funded the creation of a mentoring and open mic programme to support female performers at the Edinburgh Fringe, with the grant contributing towards the costs associated with registrations, venues, marketing, production and mentors. Since the original BBC Comedy Grant, "The Glitter Project" went on to share the Jones Bootmaker (HIS) Edinburgh Awards Panel Prize. This additional money has enabled Funny Women to take "The Glitter Project" to the Leicester Comedy Festival in February 2025 and the upcoming Brighton Fringe.

Similarly "Best in Class", a North West based organisation who support working-class stand-up comedians, received a BBC Comedy Grant in 2023 and 2024. The BBC Comedy grant in 2023 supported an event in London for 30 comedians to receive masterclasses and networking with producers, writers and show runners by contributing to attendee travel costs.

Such Brave Girls

BBC Three sitcom *Such Brave Girls* written by Kat Sadler follows a dysfunctional family made up of sisters Josie and Billie and their single mother Deb. The series won in the scripted comedy category at the 2024 Bafta TV awards, with Sadler taking home the award for Emerging Talent: Fiction. Sadler's early career was spent at the BBC, when she won a BBC comedy writing bursary and worked across different BBC Radio 4 comedy shows and writers' rooms.

"The bursary trains you up to understand how joke writing works. I had a year in-house to develop my skills, and I was thinking of new ideas all of the time."

Kat Sadler, Such Brave Girls creator and executive producer

BBC New Comedy Awards

Launched in 1995, the BBC New Comedy Awards is a nationwide talent search to find the best new comedy talent. Since they were first launched 30 years ago, the prestigious awards have helped launch the careers of many of the UK's best-loved comedians. Former finalists include Peter Kay, Lee Mack, Sarah Millican, Rhod Gilbert, Tom Allen, Angela Barnes and Joe Lycett.

The BBC New Comedy awards are the primary way that the BBC unearths new comedy talent and they attract more than 1,000 applicants each year. Shortlisted candidates perform to live audiences in regional heats across the UK, which are televised on BBC Three and BBC iPlayer. One regional winner from each of the heats is chosen to perform at the BBC New Comedy Awards Final, typically in October, which is then broadcast on BBC One. The winner receives a £1,000 prize, a 5-minute live TV slot on Comic Relief, and a paid commission to write and perform in a 30-minute audio pilot mentored by a BBC Comedy Commissioner.



In 2001, Sharon Horgan and Dennis Kelly were joint winners of the BBC New Comedy Award for Sketch Writing and Performance. Winning the award had a significant impact on their careers:

"The BBC gave me my first break really because I entered the BBC New Comedy Awards in 2001 [and won]. That was the first time I had something on the telly because then we got to film the sketches and then it was broadcast. So for a first timer that was really exciting."

Sharon Horgan

Previous winners of the BBC New Comedy Award – including Alan Carr, Lucy Beaumont, Lost Voice Guy, Nina Conti and Steve Buchanan – have also gone on to have successful UK comedy careers on- and off-screen.



Comedy Collective

The BBC Comedy Collective is a supercharged bursary scheme offering 10 places each year to emerging writers, producers, directors and editors from across the UK and who'd like to develop their career in scripted comedy. Now entering its third year, the scheme aims to support mid-level careers and is open to anyone with at least one previous credit in any genre, across any platform such as radio, theatre, stand up or commercials, and who demonstrates a clear passion and commitment to comedy.

Launched in 2022, the scheme brought together the BBC's existing writers bursaries into one scheme and was expanded to include other creative disciplines with the intention to create a script-to-screen network and provide opportunities to all areas of production. The BBC's Editors Access Scheme, which aimed to up representation of deaf, disabled and neurodivergent talent in post-production roles following the same model, was piloted for one year before being folded into the BBC Comedy Collective in 2025.

Each year, the scheme guarantees that at least one place is awarded to each of the four disciplines. To ensure representation across the UK, one bursary place is guaranteed for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and an additional

place for talent based in and around the region where the BBC Comedy Festival will take place. There will be two of the bursary placements for Northern Irish talent as it hosts this year's BBC Comedy Festival.

"Being part of the BBC Comedy Collective – as a producer – is an amazing thing. There are so few training opportunities for producers and even fewer for older regional producers, so this has been invaluable to me. The opportunity to shadow on Smoggie Queens and learn from Chris Jones (and the wider Hat Trick team) was amazing."

Zahra Zomorrodian, North East producer, BBC Comedy Collective bursary winner 2024

Each bursary winner has up to £10k worth of paid shadowing on a BBC Comedy production, along with an allocated production mentor and access to BBC commissioners, plus a £5k development grant. Paid shadowing, equivalent to £200 per day, is crucial to ensure that bursary winners have the financial means to take on additional work experience. Collective members are placed into the production community, either on a production placement or placed in an indie, to build knowledge of both their chosen and the adjacent disciplines.

"I was selected as one of the producers for the Comedy Collective bursary in 2023 and it has been the biggest opportunity of my career so far... The bursary meant I was financially able to not take work as a coordinator to facilitate developing my own slate."

Chloe Brown, Midlands based producer, BBC Comedy Collective bursary winner 2023

The additional £5k development grant is available to support additional shadowing, developing a new script or showreel or to purchase specialist

equipment and software to support their transition as the year concludes.

The bursary scheme also offers mentoring to the current cohort from Comedy Collective Ambassadors and the BBC. The Ambassadors include Ash Atalla (producers ambassador – CEO of Roughcut TV and producer of series including *The Office*, *The IT Crowd*, and *People Just Do Nothing*), Christine Gernon (directors ambassador – director of *Gavin & Stacey* and *Ghosts* series 1-3), Gareth Heal (editing ambassador – editor of *Amandland*, *Such Brave Girls*, *Henpocalypse*, and *The Witchfinder*) and ambassadors of the original writers bursaries; the Felix Dexter Bursary for aspiring black or ethnic minority writers, the Caroline Aherne Bursary for rising female comedy talent, and The Galton and Simpson Bursary for writers or writing partnerships. Previous bursary winners include Mo Gilligan who was a recipient of the Felix Dexter



Bursary and Sophie Willan and Amy Gledhill, both of whom won the Caroline Aherne Bursary.

This is supported by a range of masterclasses, workshops and events that bring together current and past bursary winners, including winners of the original comedy writing bursaries. Typically, this includes 3 to 5 in-person events each year open to all Comedy Collective alumni, an invite to the Belfast Media Festival and an invite to the BBC Comedy Festival. The BBC covers travel costs to

ensure the Comedy Collective have the financial opportunity to attend these industry skills and networking events.

Comedy Collective alumni have gone on to success. Writing duo Micheal Patrick and Oisín Kearney, placed in Year 1, have gone on to develop two script outlines with production company Two Cities, have a script commission with BBC Northern Ireland and are now working in writers' rooms. Producer Chloe Brown has gone on to become an associate producer on *Man Like Mobeen* S5 and is in development with the BFI on a debut feature.

"The Comedy Collective has been completely game changing and transformative for my career in television and scripted comedy... It's led to me producing two episodes of a new comedy drama for Channel 4, something I would never have imagined I was capable of before."

Laura Ferguson, BBC Comedy Collective bursary winner 2024, Scotland based producer

The Comedy Collective receives approximately 1,400 application each year. The third cohort of 10 BBC Comedy Collective bursary winners will be announced at the BBC Comedy Festival in May 2025.

"Being part of the BBC Comedy Collective has been genuinely transformative, impacting both my career trajectory and my personal confidence. As someone who is working class, disabled, and neurodivergent – characteristics the industry has historically encouraged us to minimise, hide, or simply exclude us for – the scheme offered a crucial message: someone with my background can have a shot at a career in television comedy."

Benjamin Bee, BBC Comedy Collective bursary winner 2023, North East based writer

Building careers in the comedy production sector

The BBC also offers support to comedy producers, production crews and other organisations with the aim to support sector development and sustainable careers.

BBC Comedy has a number of regional partnerships that run in parallel with its comedy talent schemes with the aim to provide sustainable careers across the UK. For example, in 2023, BBC Comedy and Northern Film + Media paired Hartlepool-based indie Sea & Sky Pictures with Hat Trick Productions on a shared development slate, resulting in further script commissions for the North East indie and talent.⁴¹ Similarly, BBC Comedy and Creative Wales paired Sixteen Media (Cardiff base indies) and Expectation Ents together in 2024 on a shared development slate, resulting in script commissions in comedy and drama.⁴²

More broadly, the BBC has also supported a number of comedy producers through the Small Indie Fund and Radio Indie Fund.

The Small Indie Fund ring fences £1 million a year to back talented small independent TV production companies with turnover of less than £10 million, with a special focus on diverse-led companies and those based in the Nations and English-regions. In the last four years, the BBC comedy team has awarded 28 grants and supported 23 independent companies specialising in comedy through the Small Indie Fund.

20 of the indies supported since 2020/21 have been based outside London, which includes: Scottish indies North Bridge Media, Pure Leo (which also have a South West base), and Restless Native Productions; Beastly Media and Little Wander in Wales; and Deadpan, Fabel Productions, Orbital and Nice One in Northern Ireland.

Similarly, The Radio Indie Development Fund was introduced in 2022 to support independent radio producers. Each year, BBC Radio commits more than £250k across music and speech. The Fund is currently supporting Gateshead-based Candle & Bell. Previously, it has supported Little Wander, Fabel, and Mighty Bunny (focusing on disabled writing talent).

The BBC has several talent schemes aimed at content creators, production crews and independent production companies. Although not specific to comedy, these provide support to individuals and indies working in the UK comedy sector. Each year the BBC coordinates production placements to support off-screen skills development. In recent years, these include production placements on BBC sitcom titles *Man Like Mobeen* and *Here We Go* (BBC Studios Comedy Productions) to help trainees acquire new skills and decide their future career direction. In 2023/24, *Man Like Mobeen* (Tiger Aspect Productions) filmed in the West Midlands, used the Diverse Talent Development Fund to offer six placement roles for a sound trainee, trainee production assistant, art department trainee and costume trainee.



⁴¹ [BBC Comedy Regional Partnership Scheme with Northern Film + Media and Hat Trick Productions.](#)

⁴² [BBC Comedy and Creative Wales announce details of Regional Partnership Scheme](#), April 2024.

4 OUTLOOK FOR THE UK COMEDY SECTOR

Despite its significant societal, economic and commercial value, UK comedy commissioning is facing increasing financial challenges.

This is in response to several factors, notably the rising production costs across scripted, unscripted and audio accompanied by constrained commissioning budgets in terms of the BBC's licence fee, stagnating advertising revenues for commercially funded PSBs and greater difficulty securing third-party funding from distributors.

"The BBC model is clearly different from the commercial PSBs and that gives them an ability to develop a different type of show."

Richard Watsham, Chief Creative Officer, UKTV

Production cost inflation

"Our budgets [for comedy] haven't gone up massively in the last few years, and yet the [crew day] rates have."

Nerys Evans, Creative Director, Scripted, Expectation TV

The entry of international streamers to the UK production sector has supported a flourishing industry with increased inward investment, creating jobs and economic growth – TV production revenues totalled their third highest ever level of £3.61bn in 2023.⁴³ However, within comedy this has been focussed on the high-end of the market, resulting in only a limited number of UK original titles and hours. The increased demand has impacted talent and facilities costs. This has primarily been driven by increased salary costs for scripted production crews which result from greater labour demand. Whilst a positive for the production industry, this has been challenging for UK commissioners especially as the BBC licence fee and PSB commercial revenues have not increased in step.



BBC Hungry McBear Gary Moyes

“There’s a Venn diagram of crews that work in comedy and drama and, partly as tastes have changed, there’s hardly any studio sitcoms made any more. There’s also the expectation that comedies have to look glossy in a way that they didn’t have to back in the day.”

Phil Clarke, Managing Director, Various Artists Ltd

Due to its adjacency to drama, scripted comedy has been more adversely affected than other genres as it shares many of the same scripted crew and production facilities. International streamers’ UK commissioning has tended to focus on high-end drama that will have broad appeal for their global audiences whereas there has been a lack of interest in commissioning comedy which is perceived to be more tied to UK culture and have less international appeal. There are some exceptions, including Netflix’s comedy-drama *After Life* starring Ricky Gervais, *Trying* on Apple TV+ starring Rafe Spall and Esther Smith, and *Man vs. Bee* starring Rowan Atkinson. However, the global streamers’ UK comedy commissioning is not significant enough to offset the trend decline from UK broadcasters.

“At one point, the fees streamers were paying for Drama were distorting the market by paying everyone way above what a linear tariff could achieve... Netflix were actually bidding us out... They were paying 30% more than what we could pay [crews].”

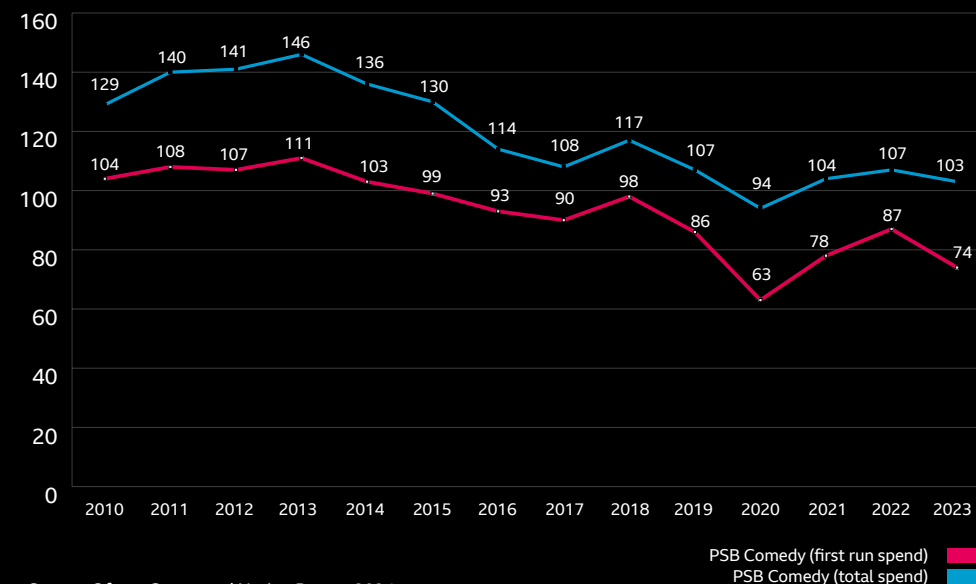
Dhanny Joshi, Managing Director, Big Deal Films

Decline in PSB commissioning power

The impact of production inflation is clearly observed in declining commissioning spend for on-screen (TV/AV) comedy amongst UK broadcasters, particularly PSBs. In 2023, overall PSB network spend on first-run comedy was 30% less than in 2010.

This has significantly impacted the volume of first-run UK-originated comedy available to audiences, particularly PSB audiences. Despite increases to the BBC Comedy budget in recent years, the number of first-run hours has not increased. In the face of rising production costs and the need to meet audience demand for comedy content since the pandemic, PSBs have increased comedy hours through acquisitions, repeats and archive content to maintain the overall volume of comedy content. Between 2018 and 2023, UK PSBs’ total hours of comedy has increased by 59% (from 1,717 to 2,723 hours) whereas first-run hours have declined by 37.5% (from 192 to 120 hours).⁴⁴

PSB COMEDY SPEND (£M), TOTAL AND FIRST-RUN



⁴⁴ Ofcom PSB hours sourced include BBC network only. Therefore overall PSB hours exclude non-network comedy commissioning spend on nation and regional ops and channels.

Comedy on BBC Three

BBC Three is the BBC's youth-orientated channel and was originally launched in 2003. BBC Three's creative remit includes all genres with the aim to commission new, innovative, contemporary Fact-Ent, Formats and Entertainment which will unite and inspire young audiences. This carries through to BBC Three's comedy commissioning, which has been significant in breaking new comedy talent and shows that may otherwise not have been commissioned.

"Comedy is a significant part of BBC Three's history. Gavin & Stacey started on BBC Three, Fleabag started on BBC Three."

Fiona Campbell, Controller of Youth Audience, BBC iPlayer & BBC Three

However, in 2014, the BBC decided to close BBC Three's linear channel and move its content online to be the BBC's first iPlayer-only channel. The decision was made as part of wider £700m BBC cost savings, as well as due to younger audiences moving online.

After six years, it was announced that BBC Three would return to linear TV. In part, this was driven by recent success of BBC Three commissioning with shows such as *Fleabag* and *This Country* going on to be aired as part of BBC One and BBC Two channel schedules.

The decision was made to reinstate the BBC Three TV in order to improve the discoverability of BBC Three content, to improve perceptions among younger audiences, and because a re-focused channel would better appeal to underserved audiences, including younger C2DE



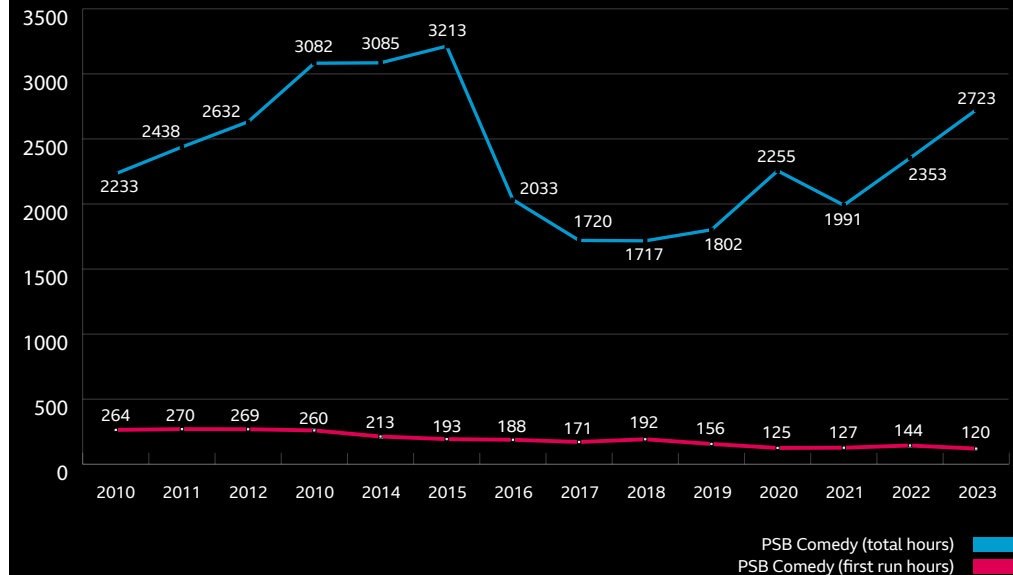
audiences, ethnically diverse audiences and audiences outside of London.⁴⁵

The decision to reopen BBC Three's linear channel – the BBC's youngest-skewing channel – is important as it allows the BBC to serve linear audiences who have not fully transitioned to IP and were unable to access BBC Three as an iPlayer-only channel. Returning as a full channel with a bolstered commissioning budget, BBC Three has a renewed sense of purpose to take creative risks and the best emerging talent to audiences, with its shows reaching some of the BBC's lightest users.

"BBC Three is a trailblazer, taking risks on bold and exciting programming that other channels might not be brave enough to do. It's an incubator for the new voices coming through."

Kat Sadler

PSB COMEDY HOURS, TOTAL AND FIRST-RUN



Source: Ofcom Connected Nation Report 2024.

Note: Ofcom data includes first-run originated and total hours for network PSB channels and nations and regions programming. Figures do not include S4C, BBC ALBA or BBC HD.

⁴⁵ [BBC Board decision on the BBC Three Public Interest Test](#), June 2021.

Declining third-party funding

Another challenge is the decline in third-party funding to support production budgets. Although securing third-party funding has always been a challenge for comedy, this has been felt more acutely in face of rising production costs. Typically, the BBC and other broadcasters would provide part, not all, of the production budget with the shortfall coming from international distributors or foreign broadcasters in return for distribution rights. Successful comedy requires risk-taking; some shows may fail to land with domestic audiences, and those that are a domestic success may be too culturally specific for international audiences to enjoy.

“The freedom to take risks is absolutely crucial to the development of brilliant comedy.”

Richard Watsham, Chief Creative Officer, UKTV

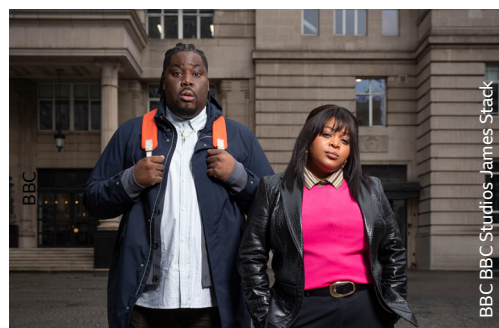
Moreover, comedy series tend to build a critical mass slowly and over multiple series. This is unlike drama where impactful shows are more likely to have overnight success, but equally don't always have the rewatchability that many comedies do. These factors alongside higher production costs that require third parties to contribute more to production budgets, has led to lower expected returns and disincentivises third party investment in UK comedy.

“Obviously we do export comedy around the world, but it's harder to export comedy than it is to export drama.”

Phil Clarke, Managing Director, Various Artists Ltd

Changing audience habits

These challenges are set against a shift amongst all audience groups away from traditional TV and radio services and towards online on-demand platforms. This is particularly apparent amongst younger audiences, who are least likely to consume from UK broadcasters' linear TV, radio or BVOD services. In 2024/25, video sharing (which includes YouTube, TikTok and Twitch) accounted for 43% of all 16-34's time spend with video content.⁴⁶



Although changing audience habits and digital technologies are a challenge for broadcasters, they also open up new opportunities to discover talent and reach new audiences. For example, the BBC discovered the creators of BBC Three and BBC Northern Ireland's comedy *Funboys* Rian Lennon and Ryan Dylan through YouTube and made a comedy short with BBC Three prior to the release of their four-part sitcom on BBC iPlayer, BBC Three, and BBC One earlier this year.

Comedy remains a key genre for UK broadcasters to 'cut through' with younger audience, however these trends mean that UK broadcasters face a declining return on investment for comedy commissioning.

“Comedy... is one of the few ways of hitting a younger audience in volume... Embracing YouTube and social media is really important.”

Richard Watsham, Chief Creative Officer, UKTV

Some broadcasters, including PSBs, have started to test out distributing content through third-party platforms, alongside direct to customer provision through their own services. Third-party platforms promote content to audiences based on engagement – not public service values such as quality, accuracy or cultural relevance. Different PSBs will take different approaches to content distribution on third-party platforms, depending on their business models and ability to monetise on third-party platforms through advertising. For the BBC, however, there are additional considerations on how content is distributed to UK audiences via third-party platforms and our owned platforms, such as iPlayer and Sounds, as the licence fee funding model relies on a strong association of content to the BBC.

Changing audience habits is also an issue for BBC audio comedy. BBC Radio 4 is a stalwart supporter of UK comedy, offering a huge range of formats from panel shows and stand-up to sitcom and sketch, and featuring both established comics and voices starting out. Radio 4 has the opportunity to reach a new generation of comedy listeners, who may not yet be aware of the range of comedy content available on Radio 4, or don't have an existing scripted audio habit and are more familiar with “chatty comedy”, a format popularised by podcasts such as *Off Menu* or *Sh**ged Married Annoyed*.

BBC audio commissioners are acutely aware of the challenge, including that there is not currently an audio comedy offering specifically aimed at younger audiences. However, BBC Sounds-only commissions and acquisitions in the comedy and entertainment space are aiming to address this, for example *Miss Me?* with Lily Allen and Miquita Oliver and *Help I Sexted My Boss* with William Hanson and Jordan North, *Traitors Unlocked*, and *Joanne McNally Investigates*. More generally, younger-skewing audio is an exciting opportunity for the BBC and our younger audiences.

“There isn't a single comedy perch [for audio comedy] targeting younger audiences, which there should be because that would change perceptions of the BBC across the whole portfolio.”

Fiona Campbell, Controller, BBC Three



⁴⁶ Barb As Viewed

5 CONCLUSIONS

Comedy, and UK comedy specifically, punches above its cultural weight for audiences both in the UK and abroad. It is highly valued by audiences, able to be both highly local and universal in its scope, deliver joy and escapism at the same time as addressing serious issues.

It is also an important part of the UK production sector and delivers significant economic value, through UK production jobs, exports and attracting inward investment. Some of the UK's most recognised on and off-screen talent started out in comedy – from Jesse Armstrong to Michaela Coel to Phoebe Waller-Bridge.

For over a hundred years, the BBC has been at the absolute heart of the UK TV and audio comedy sector. It's right that the BBC leads the way in UK comedy, and we remain the biggest commissioner of first-run scripted, unscripted, and radio content today. BBC network has accounted for over 75% of first-run PSB comedy spend and nearly 80% of first-run PSB comedy hours since 2021. We are distinctive in our commitment to taking creative risks and investing in new talent from across the UK. Our broad range of public services allows us to serve different audiences and build a talent pipeline.

But there are headwinds that are threatening this culturally and economically significant genre, with public service broadcaster commissioning budgets under pressure, persistent high inflation due to demand for talent and infrastructure, and challenges in securing third-party financing and distribution.

Urgent action is needed from both industry and the Government to protect this jewel in the UK's cultural crown.



BBC Studios Elaine Livingston



1. Government support for sustainable and futureproof public service broadcasting, recognising the jeopardy the ecosystem faces.

The PSBs account for the vast majority of investment in UK original content in terms of number of commissions and are the bedrock on which international investment is built. But they face structural financial challenges, including a decline in licence fee and ad revenue – which have been followed by a commissioning slowdown.⁴⁷ In addition, to reach all audiences, the PSBs have to bear the cost of providing programmes over broadcast and online services. Interventions are needed to address this. Interventions are needed to address this challenge and deliver sustainable, futureproof PSB – including significant and sustainable public funding for the BBC, exploring how the balance of PSB benefits and obligations (the PSB “compact”) could be updated given the changing landscape, and considering the need for prominence requirements that address algorithms and AI recommendations and go beyond the TV environment.

2. Supporting the financing of scripted comedy at all levels, including updating the tax credits system.

The Government should explore ways it could support the financing of genres such as comedy that increasingly face funding challenges as they are perceived as higher-risk, but are nevertheless culturally vital and economically important.

The BBC is calling for further support for scripted TV comedy through tax credits. Tax credits are proven to work, incentivising investment in UK content production and at-risk genres. Comedy has benefitted from the High-End TV tax relief, which has been a lifeline for some shows and enabled broadcasters and producers from across the UK to work together to create hits, including *Two Doors Down* and *Alma's Not Normal*. However, not all of the comedy market is eligible for the current tax relief, with a long tail of shows with smaller budgets that are enjoyed by audiences and are a critical part of the comedy pipeline. Support is needed across the whole ecosystem, not just the top end. We therefore believe that the Government should consider a targeted change to the audio-visual tax reliefs, by introducing tax relief for all scripted comedy, not just those productions that meet the HETV tax relief expenditure threshold.

More broadly, the Government should also consider how a well-designed tax credits system might meet objectives such as incentivising co-production, protection for IP, or PSB windows through an uplift to the HETV tax relief, to ensure a future for UK comedy within a thriving mixed media ecology.

3. Partnership between organisations including PSBs, streamers, screen agencies, and distributors, to increase the volume of comedy produced in the UK. We believe that more collaboration and co-investment between PSBs and other commissioners is needed, to ensure that the next generation of great British comedy shows entertain audiences in the UK and around the world.

4. Investment in comedy-specific skills and opportunities. The Government should work with the BBC, ScreenSkills, and other partners across the ecosystem to deliver evidence-based skills policy and funding and convene partners across industry and education to futureproof the sector's skills pipeline. There must also be a focus on addressing regional skills gaps so that people can build and sustain a comedy career within a creative cluster if they choose.



5. Exploring innovation in new forms of comedy content. As noted in this report, while changing audience habits and digital technologies are a challenge for broadcasters, they also open up new ways to discover talent, deliver content, and reach new audiences. The BBC is excited to explore these opportunities. BBC Director-General Tim Davie recently set out our ambition to make the BBC a go-to partner for the next generation of content creators, and the prospect of launching a comprehensive package of support for the UK domestic creator economy from skills training to tools, equipment, and facilities, as part of an ambitious Charter Review for the BBC.

The year ahead in BBC comedy

For the BBC, 2025 is an exciting year celebrating British comedy. The next 10 creatives making up the BBC Comedy Collective will be imminently announced at the BBC Comedy Festival in Northern Ireland. We also celebrate 30 years since the BBC New Comedy Award launched.

Most thrilling is a year of impressive comedy programming, including sitcom *Can You Keep A Secret*, starring Dawn French and Alan Partridge's journey of self-discovery in *How Are You? It's Alan (Partridge)*. There will be second series of Bafta-winning comedies *Such Brave Girls* by Kat Sadler, *Dreaming Whilst Black* by Adjani Salmon, *Juice* from Mawaan Rizwaan, and *Dinosaur* from Ashley Storrie and Matilda Curtis.

In audio, some of the highlights include returning unscripted series *One Person Found This Helpful* starring Frank Skinner and *Unspeakable* with Phil Wang and Susie Dent, sitcoms *Call Jonathan Pie* and *Rum Punch*, and new stand-up chat series *Your Mum* with the award-winning Laura Smyth. However, we believe that now is the time to act – to ensure that audiences can continue to laugh at great British comedy.

⁴⁷ Pact/O&O 2024.

Annex I: List of contributors

Industry stakeholders interviewed as part of the primary research are listed below.

Ash Atalla
CEO
Roughcut TV

Charlie Brooker
Co-founder Broke & Bones, creator, writer and executive producer, Cunk and Black Mirror

Fiona Campbell
Controller
BBC Three

Phil Clarke
Managing Director
Various Artists Ltd

James Corden
BAFTA, Tony and Emmy Award winning writer, actor, producer and host. *Gavin & Stacey* co-creator, co-writer and executive producer

Phil Dunning
Smoggie Queens creator, writer and performer

Nerys Evans
Creative Director
Scripted, Expectation TV

Sharon Horgan
Co-founder of Merman, co-creator Pulling, Motherland, Amandaland, Catastrophe, and Bad Sisters

Dhanny Joshi
Managing Director
Big Deal Films

Guz Khan
Co-founder Dice Roll productions, Man Like Mobeen co-creator and co-writer

Julia McKenzie
Commissioning Editor
Comedy & Entertainment, BBC Radio 4

Jon Petrie
Comedy Commissioning Director
BBC

Kat Sadler
Such Brave Girls creator and executive producer

Louise Thornton
Head of Multiplatform Commissioning
BBC Scotland

Richard Watsham
Chief Creative Officer
UKTV

Other contributors who have provided written feedback on their experiences with BBC Comedy's talent and outreach schemes and provided permission to use quotes.

Benjamin Bee, North East based writer and BBC Comedy Collective bursary winner 2023

Chloe Brown, Midlands based producer and BBC Comedy Collective bursary winner 2023

Anna Costello, NE based writer, placed on BBC Comedy Festival and Regional Partnership Scheme with Sea & Sky Pictures and Hat Trick.

Laura Ferguson, Scotland based producer and BBC Comedy Collective bursary winner 2024

Morwenna Godon, Expectation Ents, paired with Sixteen Media through BBC Comedy and Creative Wales Regional Partnership Scheme

Donya Majidi Maguire, London based editor and BBC Comedy Collective bursary winner 2024

Lynne Parker, Founder, Funny Women (beneficiary of a BBC Comedy grant)

Zahra Zomorrodian, North East based producer and BBC Comedy Collective bursary winner 2024

We'd like to thank everyone that has supported and contributed to this research.