



Public Attitudes Towards BBC Online

A Report of the Findings of a Qualitative Research
Study

Prepared for : COI Communications

**And their clients : The Independent Review of BBC
Online Services**

**CPR1012
April 2004**

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1. Background to the Research

The BBC was given approval (in 1997 and 1998) to develop on-line services by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Following the dramatic expansion of their on-line services, and in the run-up to Charter Review in 2004, a review was set up to examine public perceptions of how BBC Online is performing against the terms of the original consent, and to establish issues which should be considered in the future.

The original terms of the consent were as follows:

- I To act as an essential resource offering wide-ranging, unique content
- II To use the internet to forge a new relationship with licence payers and strengthen accountability
- III To provide a home for licence payers on the internet and act as a trusted guide to the new media environment

At the time of consent, the BBC said that the aims of the online service were to:

- Enhance and enrich the value of existing broadcast content; supporting the provision of education, information and entertainment offered on the BBC's core services by providing extra in-depth information and research;
- Offer innovative and creative new services to the licence payer;
- Facilitate communication and interaction between the BBC and the audience (and within the audience) enhancing accountability and offering opportunities to listen to their views;
- Enhance the relationship with parts of the audience - (particularly young people), as an investment in the audiences of the future;
- And in doing so, provide genuine social, cultural and citizenship benefit with services which deliver the BBC's core objectives such as independent and accurate news and information, support for British culture and entertainment, and communicating with the rest of the world, and contribute to the overall aim of supporting the development of the information superhighway for the benefit of all licence fee payers.

As part of their review of BBC Online, The Independent Review of BBC Online Services, through COI Communications, commissioned Counterpoint Research to evaluate public perceptions of, and attitudes towards BBC Online.

2. Research Objectives

The overall aim of the research was to assess internet users' perceptions of, and attitudes towards the BBC's website. The main research objectives were as follows, and the detailed objectives are in Appendix One.

- What role does BBC Online have for internet users, and what role do they feel it should have?
- Does it fulfill its public service broadcasting role?
- Does BBC Online reflect BBC values?
- How well has BBC Online performed against its original remit, as given in the background?
- What role has BBC Online had, qualitatively defined, in pushing people towards, or helping them discover more about, the internet?
- How does it compare with other resources available?
- Does BBC Online represent good value for money?

3. Methodology & Sample

The sample covered a wide spread of the UK's internet users, split between current users of BBC Online, and non- or very light users of BBC Online. The detailed description of the sample is given in the Appendix. A summary of the sample is as follows:

- 12 groups with medium-heavy users of BBC Online
 - split by lifestage (pre-family, with dependent family living at home, empty nesters/ older single people)
 - split by social class (BC1, C2D(E))
 - split by weight of internet usage

- 12 groups with very light-non-users of BBC Online
 - split by lifestage (pre-family, with dependent family living at home, empty nesters/ older single people)
 - split by social class (BC1, C2D(E))
 - split by weight of internet usage

- 8 Paired depths with young people
 - split by school Year (Yr 8 – Year 11)
 - split male/ female
 - split BC1/ C2DE

- 4 mini-groups with older young people
 - split by age/ school year (Year 12 – A level/ FE college)
 - split male/ female
 - split BC1/ C2DE

Fieldwork was held between the 10th March & 11th April 2004. The locations the research was held in were as follows: Belfast, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Leeds, Birmingham, Sutton Coldfield, Watford, Cardiff, Port Talbot, and Wimbledon.

4. Stimulus Material and Discussion Guides

The first part of the discussion covered respondents' use of the internet, their likes and dislikes in relation to websites, and their spontaneous attitudes towards BBC Online. In the second part of the groups and depths the moderators explored BBC Online with the respondents, via a laptop computer and a projector.

Detailed discussion guides are included in Appendix One.

5. Summary & Conclusions

5.1. Use of the Internet

5.1.1. The Internet as 'favourite sites' + 'what the search engine brings up'

Respondents saw the internet as a wonderful, but vast and unstructured resource. They felt that users had to exercise individual responsibility when surfing the internet, since it was not feasible to control the content of the internet. They argued that everyone would come across something distasteful at some point, and that they should simply click out of the site rather than take offence or feel 'damaged' by it in some way. Parents felt that it was their responsibility to educate their children on good behaviour on the internet, but that ultimately, they had to trust their children to be responsible surfers. Thus the concept of a 'safe and trusted guide' to the internet was perceived to be rather odd: it implied a restricted use of the internet, and did not reflect the way they were currently using the internet.

Few respondents, aside from the very new surfers, were spending much time genuinely 'browsing' the internet. Their use tended to be much more 'goal-driven'. Thus, in order to get to the 'goal' from amongst the vast number of sites comprising the internet, they relied on the search engine very heavily indeed. Most users built up a core of sites they regularly visited, but again this tended to be for specific information or needs : news, weather reports, discount travel booking, sports, music and children's/ teens dedicated pages. Gamers were slightly different in that they tended to keep exploring sites to make sure they were using the 'coolest' sites. Thus, the web became almost two separate entities : the sites they knew, visited regularly and had a relationship with – which were often used in a very utilitarian way; and the rest of the web which was often a vague blank in their perceptions, navigated almost solely by the use of a search engine.

The search engine – most often Google – was felt to reflect the values of the internet in that it would take them directly, and at best only, to what they wanted. However, because the search engine went through the whole of the web, it was also valued for giving them "*unfettered*" choice. Once they had found what they were looking for, they neither bookmarked the site, nor explored it particularly for other information or 'just to see' what was available. This was particularly true of those with dial-up access only. Search engines were also valued because of its serendipitous nature: occasionally surfers found it fun and interesting to link into a site with one set of expectations to find something surprising, or irrelevant, however their choice of their favoured search engine was completely dependent on that engine delivering successfully against their requirements.

'Portal' was a concept that respondents were neither familiar with nor understood.

5.1.2. Role of the location of the computer

Most were accessing the internet on a home computer, often a shared computer. Some had internet access at work, and within that sample, some of those had restricted access to the internet, often including BBC Online. Work browsing tended to be even more goal directed, often solely for news or business information. Those with internet access at school or college were using it for very limited purposes : usually for information for homework or projects. Thus they would access the internet in one way when at home, and in a rather different way when at school.

5.2. Expectations and Perceptions of BBC Online

5.2.1. How respondents talked about the site

Respondents almost all referred to the site as either “*the BBC’s website*”, or as *bbc.co.uk*. Interestingly, they talked about the quality of their interaction with the site in a very ‘flat’ way. That is, they didn’t see themselves as using different levels of interactivity or not within the site – they simply thought they were clicking on different parts of the site. Where interactivity worked best (e.g. in the news or radio streaming), was where they felt they only had to click another link, or fill boxes in.

5.2.2. Finding out about the site

Young people and children tended to have found out about the site through teachers’ or lecturers’ recommendations. They used the site to search for information, by and large, for revision, as well as for some games or fun content (principally through CBBC or the Teen site). There was some usage of radio sites from the older age ranges.

Adults were likely to have heard of the site via the end of programme promotions. Some had become familiar with it and used it principally because it was the only internet access at work; others had been recommended the site by internet ‘trainers’. Finally, those who had been taken to the site via a search engine hadn’t then bookmarked the page they had been taken to. A few had *bbc.co.uk* as their home page, set up by someone else, and a few within the sample had a BBC Online page other than the home page as their home page (Radio 3, Radio 4, BBC News principally).

5.2.3. Expectations and perceptions of the site

Both adults’ and children’s expectations of the site, and their reasons for having visited were a) to follow up an interest via a programme website; b) for help or information for homework, project work etc.; and/or c) because they expected BBC to have credible information in relation to their query.

Respondents had very little sense of the site in overall terms. They thought of the ‘BBC’s website’ in the same terms as any other company’s corporate website, or they thought of the 2 or 3 sub-sites that they had used or seen promoted at the end of programmes. Users felt that the site (or at least the parts of it that they were familiar with) was excellent quality. Non-users and very light users expected that the

site would be a good one, but that it would be very tightly related to specific programmes. They also expected that the site would be very “*establishment*” and “*politically correct*”. This expectation was contradicted by their experience of site itself.

5.2.4. The BBC versus other sites

When taken through the site by the moderators, both users and non-users were very surprised indeed by the breadth and range of the site. They certainly judged it to be high quality, well communicated, and engaging, however both current users and non-users were very surprised that they didn't know about the range of what BBC Online covered. Whilst they felt that the sheer range of topics covered, and the range of topics covered in such depth, was unique, they felt that each individual site was not. They also argued that the reason that the BBC could cover such a range of topics in such depth was because it was a unique organisation in terms of being publicly funded but having to be commercially competitive, that no other similar organisation had the level of resources that the BBC had.

Even after the group surf, respondents still talked about and perceived the website as a series of loosely related individual sites, rather than as a 'portal' or 'service'. Thus, they felt that each individual site was an alternative to other sites only on a site-by-site level. They didn't see BBC Online as competing with Sky.com, rather they saw BBC Online news page as competing with Sky News' webpage. Their use of the site was on this very specific level.

5.2.5. Current Usage of BBC Online

The heaviest users of BBC Online within the sample tended to be news and sports fans. Radio sites were also used regularly, and were the most common location for streaming usage. Young people tended to visit the education-related elements of the site most often, particularly Bitesize, or anything which would help with homework/ college related work.

Users who had followed up programmes via the site were very surprised indeed to see the range of different types of information, which was available on the site. Whilst they felt the programme-related sites were unique in the sense of being specific to that programme, they felt that the actual information contained within each of the sites was available on other sites.

The main reasons users were not building up a sense of the site in overall terms, or exploring within the site more, was the confusion caused by the home page, and their lack of use of the search function. Those using the 'Where I Live' section valued it very highly indeed, but again tended to surf within the local site rather than use 'Where I Live' to explore BBC Online or the web further.

5.3. Prompted Views of BBC Online

5.3.1. Opinions of the site after group browsing

Respondents were very impressed indeed by the range, depth and quality of what they saw on the BBC website when taken through the various categories, options and types of information available. They described it variously as of high quality, clear, in depth, interesting, relevant and well written. They felt that the BBC had taken its skills in the communications field, and applied it to the website. They judged it to be professional and balanced. They felt that the BBC amassed an enormous amount of information, knowledge and skills when putting programmes together and that what BBC Online gave them was unfettered access to that information, knowledge and skill whenever they wanted. They felt that the traditional BBC values had been clearly applied to the site: i.e. in terms of fairness, how informative it was, high quality, well presented, engaging, professional, expert, trustworthy, educational, British and independent.

Respondents felt that they would be able to rely on the information given in terms of it being accurate, fair and balanced, however they felt that the 'tone' of the site varied appropriately between sites, e.g. BBC News (serious, professional, comprehensive, balanced) vs Chewin' the Fat (funny, irreverent, one-sided, 'edge-y') vs Eastenders (sentimental, emotional) vs Absolutely Fabulous (irreverent and disrespectful).

"British" was a term that respondents applied to the site in a very positive way. That is, not only did they judge this to be a site that seemed to treat its subject matter using British values of fairness, decency etc., it was also a major presence on the world wide web which was British and something to be proud of.

The issues which were identified within the discussion of the website tended not to be related to its content or quality. Respondents felt it certainly informed, and definitely had a wealth of in-depth and high quality educative material, material which was presented in an entertaining way. Rather, they felt that the problems with the site were as follows: a) they had no idea of the extent of the site, which they felt they should have known; b) they found it difficult to build up a sense of what's on the site even when surfing the site, i.e. navigation was not enticing or easy, and c) there was no clear idea or declaration of what the site was trying to be or do, aside from cover every subject that the BBC makes programmes about. This mattered to them because they felt that they were missing out on so much of the site because they didn't know about it. Further, on reflection, and on thinking about the funding of the site (i.e. via the licence fee), respondents argued that it was even more important that they be made aware of the range and extent of the site because they were funding the site, but not being given a proper invitation to use it to its full potential (by being made aware of its coverage). Some even suggested that the BBC should be making short films to replace on-air brand or cross promotion, which would show potential users of the site a bit more about the site and how to use it.

5.3.2. Views of the search engine after prompted analysis

The search engine was viewed in the context of the 'safe' BBC, which actually served to undermine its value : that is, part of the point of using the internet was to be given absolutely free range in your choice. The BBC's 'safe' search engine undermined that to an extent. Second, although parents could see the potential value of this feature, they felt that their children would be able to by-pass any 'nannying' or limiting of their surfing in an instant. Third, it confused them that a 'site' had a 'search' which took them through the whole of the web. This was not how they currently saw the web : they used the search in general as the prime mode of navigating in and out of sites, rather than a search as part of a site which would take them in and out of other (competitor) sites.

The 'UK only' feature was appreciated, but already part of their searching on Google, and the BBC Online recommended sites made them question the true independence of the BBC if it was recommending (c.f. providing links to) commercial sites.

The biggest issue in relation to the search function, however, was just why they should use the BBC Online search engine rather than Google.

5.3.3. Views of the home page after prompted analysis

Very real issues emerged when thinking about and discussing the home page. Both users and non-users criticised the page heavily, as unhelpful, busy, dull, with too many unqualified or unexplained links, and strange or unfamiliar terms and descriptions. Not only was there no clear navigation system on the left hand side of the page (c.f. the very clear and liked system on the news page), but the grey bar was too often missed completely since it was difficult to see on the page, but didn't make sense to most.

As a whole, the home page failed to give users an idea of what the site was and could do; the navigation was unclear; and the terms used not understood. As such it was a significant barrier to their exploring BBC Online, and, through BBC Online, more of the internet.

5.3.4. 'Where I Live'

Very few respondents were aware of, or had used the 'Where I Live' section. The few who had valued it very highly indeed. After being shown the section, most respondents found it very interesting and potentially valuable. Some recommended that this type of information – particularly the local listings - should be available within the relevant 'interest'. A minority within the groups – typically older respondents – preferred to buy a local paper to access this type of information.

5.2.5. Prompted reactions to the news petal

Opinions of the news section were very high indeed. They praised the lay-out of this section, its navigational principles, and the 'logical' organisation of topic. They felt that it had an appropriate balance

between giving them a complete overview of all of the stories available to them, and links to click for more detailed information on each of the items of interest. Respondents judged the content to be varied, of high quality and in-depth. They particularly liked the idea that this was available to them anytime and anywhere. Many had set it up as their home page and used it very regularly indeed.

Although highly praised, the news site was not encouraging them to browse other areas of the site. Further, the general feeling was that the news site was only covering the same content as other news sites, albeit in more depth, with better organisation and from a more 'British' angle.

5.2.6. Prompted reactions to the sports petal

The sports petal was also highly rated. They felt that the listings were excellent, the reporting was of a high quality, and the coverage was comprehensive. They judged the tone to be very appropriate: light, clear and confident. Many were using this element of the site in an interactive way. Most sports fans were using BBC Online (and non-users envisaged using BBC Online in the future) alongside their team's official website, and a couple of unofficial websites. Their surfing was almost always based around a specific team or sport. Thus, 'competitor' sites tended to be other sites covering their team or sport, rather than other broadcasters.

5.2.7. Prompted reactions to the children's petal

Parents, teachers and children all put a very high value on this petal. Most felt it combined high quality content with excellent and engaging presentation. It was certainly a trusted source of information amongst all, and parents were happy for the site to be handling more difficult questions with their children.

5.2.8. Prompted reactions to the learning petal

Children and young people valued the Bitesize revision guides and other educational material very highly indeed, and judged BBC Online to be unique in terms of providing this kind of targeted, engaging, educational, useful content. This was particularly true in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales where young people argued that it was very difficult to get this kind of targeted material. They judged it to be easy to use, fun, and very relevant.

There was little awareness of adult learning on the site, and many respondents left the groups professing an interest in finding out more about the learning resources on BBC Online.

5.2.9. Prompted reactions to the TV & radio petal

This section was praised for being well organised and easy to navigate, however respondents were surprised and critical that BBC Online contained only BBC listings. Expectations of this petal were that it would contain the kind of content which they found in Entertainment, and again they were confused when navigating this site.

Generally, the material related to specific programmes was liked, and was absolutely what they expected from the BBC's website. They used it (and intended to use it) to follow up specific interests and to enhance their enjoyment of a programme.

Interest in the Radio pages of BBC Online was qualitative different: listeners tended to have a much stronger and closer relationship with their radio station, and so tended to bookmark their station of interest. Users reported using the streaming function more regularly to time-shift their listening or catch up on a missed interview.

5.2.10. Prompted reactions to the lifestyle petal

Respondents hated the term 'lifestyle', but many had explored these pages via follow up to particular programmes. They were looking for all kinds of follow up, but generally felt that these pages (although badly titled) provided a very valuable resource in terms of helpful and practical content. They compared these pages with special interest magazines (not their sites) and felt that BBC Online competed very well with those kinds of magazines. However, when comparing the website to magazines respondents emphasized how important the visual element of a magazine was, and argued that no website could compete on that level.

5.2.11. Prompted reactions to the health petal

This site was rarely used within the sample, and after prompting respondents, it was interesting that so many were surprised that the BBC had a health section. Once they accepted its relevance, they could see the benefits that the BBC might bring to this area. Some were suspicious that the health section might be very one-sided in terms of only putting the 'official' argument on an issue, however after the group surf, the general feeling was that the site put forward an expert, balanced and fair portrayal of health issues.

5.4. What is BBC Online and What Could it Be?

Users perceived BBC Online to be a series of high quality, interesting, well designed sites. However, because they are rarely browsing, and when they are, they are thinking about a very specific interest, there was no feeling that the site pulled them in and prompted them to explore either the web, or indeed their website, in more depth. The value of the site that is distinctively 'BBC' was a set of principles (the 'values' described in 6.3.1) applied across a **range** of discrete sites. The only sense in which BBC Online was unique was in the sense of that range provided.

Across the broad variety of demographic types represented within the sample, almost everyone felt that because the BBC had to compete in a commercial environment, it was legitimate for it to be doing everything their competitors were. They felt that the BBC had worked hard to make the content accessible to them, and that the BBC had gathered or grouped related topics or links together to make surfing easier for them. This was particularly the case when thinking about

specific topics and reflected the way they use the internet. Thus, if they were interested in gardening, they would find everything they needed under the gardening website. Therefore, they would be happy for BBC Online to provide links to unofficial websites of their favourite football team within their section of the site dealing with that team : that adds value by making their surfing easier.

Respondents felt that it was difficult to say that BBC Online should or should not be covering certain subjects in certain ways. The exception to this rule was where the BBC was felt to be contradicting the traditional values, for instance of independence. There was some concern that the BBC's coverage of the Hutton Enquiry – whether on air or on-line – was slightly biased in favour of the BBC. Other than this circumstance, respondents felt that it was the duty of the BBC to put its resources behind providing them with high quality, contemporary content across the range of what its competitors were doing, and to promote that they were doing that so that they could access it if they wanted.

5.5. Funding Issues

Most respondents hadn't thought about how BBC Online was funded, and thus being made to think about it, unsurprisingly, provoked negative reactions. Indeed, most respondents wanted to talk about the licence fee *per se*, i.e. whether they were getting value for money from the BBC as a whole, and not specifically in relation to BBC Online. Interestingly, very few respondents had any idea what proportion of their licence fee was spent on BBC Online. Indeed, many were very unclear about how much their fee was. However, when told that around 3% of their average £116 fee was spent on BBC Online, most felt that this sum was fairly insignificant, since BBC Online gave them access to the resources of the BBC but in more depth, and at their (the viewer's/ user's) convenience, and therefore represented value for money.

A minority within the sample were prepared to allow advertising on the BBC site specifically to fund BBC Online, however the vast majority argued very strongly against any commercial interest at all on any part of the BBC.

Whilst many found the idea of subscription appealing as a way of avoiding having people who couldn't use BBC Online paying for it, almost all, in practice, felt that they already paid for BBC services they didn't use (radio, special interests), and that subscription to the site would lead to no-one using it, which would be counter-productive from their point of view (as well as the BBC's).

5.6. Implications & Conclusions

5.6.1. Changes to navigation, home page and BBC Online promotion

Almost all respondents left the groups claiming that they were going to explore the site on their next surf. Clearly they were upset that they

didn't know about the extent of this publicly funded resource, but were both delighted by the prospect of so much content to explore and annoyed that they hadn't been informed about the range of what BBC Online offered. That is, after being shown around the site, they put a value on BBC Online which was much higher than simply a support for BBC programmes and their topics – which was what most had expected or experienced it to be prior to the group discussions.

There is a potentially powerful and unique role for BBC Online in terms of facilitating users to become much more active in terms of their consumption : that is, helping them become their own editors and schedulers. The site already does this to an extent via the ease of use of the streaming buttons – which respondents simply saw as another 'click' – and through its constant accessibility, however there is real potential for the BBC to help and support users to construct their own 'mybbc.co.uk' as their own home page.

The most crucial issue for users is that they feel they have been denied access to the whole of the resource because of its lack of promotion (or even mis-promotion), and the difficulties they experience navigating the site. They end up using the site in the context of their specific interests, and there is no feature to help them explore other elements of the site. They felt actively discouraged from exploring by the poor quality of the home page.

Navigation needs to be clearer and the principles need to be applied site-wide, so that users do not have to learn a new navigation principle every time they click through to a new BBC Online site (e.g. the 'lifestyle navigator' vs news navigation). It would also be helpful if the navigation made it clearer where the user was within the overall site.

5.6.2. Is BBC Online fulfilling its original conditions of consent?

1. “As essential resource offering wide-ranging and unique content”

It is difficult, given the way that the broad range of respondents are using the web, to value anything on the internet as “unique” or “essential”. Certainly BBC Online succeeds in providing wide ranging content. It is valued for providing in-depth, impartial (broadly) and comprehensive content. However, to judge any one website to be unique, amongst the millions which users perceive to be available to them, contradicts perceptions and usage of the internet. Thus, considered as separate sites – which is essentially how almost all the respondents saw BBC Online – it is not unique.

There are two areas in which BBC Online is, however, unique. The first is in the context of the educational content, particularly Bitesize. Both parents and children are using it rather than all other resources available because it is uniquely related to the curriculum, fun (broadly) for the children to use, and very high quality. This is attributed to the BBC’s many, many years of experience in this field, their communication skills generally (in order to make the educational content consumable/ fun for children), and their considerable financial resources : all of this allows them to develop, promote and make available this facility. This combination is not found in any other organisation or its website, whether the DfES, another broadcaster, or commercial learning organisation.

The second element of ‘uniqueness’ comes from BBC Online as a whole : however because users are not aware of ‘BBC Online’ as a whole, this is currently inferred rather than experienced. That is, BBC Online represents a series of in-depth specialisms, which manifests itself as a series of excellent web-sites. These websites are very well presented indeed because the BBC is a specialist communication company. It is also legitimate for the BBC to be providing content across the very wide range that it currently is. The ‘unique’ element, however, is that spread or range contained within BBC Online, a range which is not currently seen or valued by users.

Thus, the more that users have a sense of using BBC Online, and not a sub-site, the more unique it is felt to be, and the higher the value they put on BBC Online. Similarly, the more they find that it facilitates their self-editing and self-scheduling, the more they feel they are active consumers, and thus not simply accessing information which is available elsewhere.

2. “Forging a new relationship with licence payers and strengthening accountability”

For most users, BBC Online is only providing additional access around programmes, and some follow-up additional information around specific interests they have. Thus, it is fulfilling a role which other websites also fulfil, rather than creating a new relationship.

Similarly, the site is not strengthening accountability in the way that users would like it to or use it for. That is, it might provide another channel through which to comment on, or try to have an influence on the BBC, but that channel, i.e. email, is just seen as another version of mail, rather than allowing a new type of access or participation. The kind of participation which would make users feel that they were being given more access and that the BBC was strengthening its accountability would be a series of open debates with newscasters on the BBC's (and BBC Online's) coverage of the Hutton Enquiry, for instance. Certainly there is no sense or evidence that BBC Online is engaging and encouraging users to participate in the BBC.

Interestingly though, there is a sense that the more sophisticated and heavier users are leveraging more from the BBC via BBC Online, but this is characterised by a sense of having power over their own information and entertainment consumption: i.e. changing the nature of the relationship by allowing the user more say and control over what they are accessing.

3. “A home for licence payers on the internet, ... a trusted guide”

As argued throughout this report, users now see the internet as such a fragmented, enormous and uncontrollable resource, providing each individual with (potentially) exactly what they're looking for, that the idea of a 'home', and certainly a 'portal', is difficult to value. The value is in the quality of the search that they use to organise the web, unless there is a personal 'control panel' home page which is worth the effort of programming because of the direct and instant access it gives them to their own personal interests.

Specifically, if 'a home on the web' is defined by them being a familiar, confidence-building, easy to use, clear home page (such as their search page currently); if it means easy and direct access to the information they're looking for; if it means engaging users and suggesting interesting and relevant links to them (both within BBC Online and outside the site), as well as the kind of 'control panel' identified above, then BBC Online was not currently fulfilling that role.

It is hard to overstate the importance of the 'new' context for surfing : users now expect to find everything via a search engine and have an incredible dependence on them (to the extent they are annoyed when their favourite engine doesn't produce a successful link and they have to use a less familiar one). They are in the driving seat of their engine so that they can go exactly where they want and when they want : the idea of being guided to specific places is an odd and no longer relevant one, unless it adds the facility to become an active controller via another route.

4. Does BBC Online inform, educate and entertain?

Clearly BBC Online not only fulfils the requirement to educate, but exceeds expectations and is unique in this respect.

BBC Online, similarly, has provided an astonishing and extremely valuable range of relevant, interesting, useful and credible information.

'Entertain' is a more difficult element to judge in the context of the internet – which is in essence seen as a databank. 'Entertainment' is something which is highly dependent on the individual. Certainly young people felt that true entertainment in the context of the internet involved content that was either out of the 'safe' environment of school or their parents (rotten.com), or was highly specialist in nature – games, music, chat sites which were specifically only those things rather than generalist. Thus, given the BBC's overall remit, it is difficult to see how it could deliver in this context. Where it adds an enormously important value, is in delivering its information and education in an entertaining way.

For adults too, true entertainment has a passive element to it : "*sitting back*" and listening to music; watching television (passively). Again it is difficult to judge BBC Online in the context of a website. However, it is clear that much of the content that users enjoy is enjoyed precisely because it is delivered in an entertaining way when appropriate.

6. Key Findings from the Research

6.1. Use of the Internet, and Implications for BBC Online

6.1.1. Perceptions & Usage of the Internet : the Internet as 'Regular sites' + 'What I find via a Search Engine'

Respondents tended to share an understanding of what the internet was, and what it was like, no matter how long or how often they used it. Their perception was that the internet was a vast system of information which contained everything that anyone might ever want to know, as well as a lot that most people didn't want to know. Not only did they see it as vast, but also largely unstructured, and necessarily unstructured. They found it difficult to make sense of as a whole, and had gone through experiences of spending a long time trying to get to information they needed, but ending up on sites which "*were complete rubbish*", or which contained good, but irrelevant information. Thus, they argued that it was impossible to think about the internet as anything other than a wonderful resource, containing a depth and breadth of information previously unimagined. They tended to find it seductive, i.e. that it would pull users in and distract them from their initial intentions, leading to them spending hours meandering through sites, with no identifiable 'outcome'.

"You spend hours there. I don't approve of the internet... because people just spend hours and hours doing nothing. I've got better things to do than that of an evening"

(Empty Nesters/ Singles, 50-60, BC1, Lighter Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Edinburgh)

Much of their perception of the internet had been informed by the media, as well as their experience of using the internet (which may explain why attitudes were so similar between different kinds of users of the internet). Many had read about the danger of paedophiles 'grooming' young people via internet chat rooms. Others had read about, or accidentally come across "*sick*" or distasteful sites such as rotten.com.

"I've done that rotten.com, I just wanted to see what the fuss was about"

(Pre-family, 26-40, C2DE, Heavier Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Glasgow)

Interestingly however, although they felt these sites should not be on the internet, and that individuals should not be using chat rooms for this purpose, none felt that there was anything personally dangerous. They felt that, as adults, they were bound to come across something, when browsing, which they found distasteful, stupid or sick, however they all argued that the appropriate response was to "*click away*" from the site.

"If you don't want to get upset, then don't go on the internet ... I think it's (censorship of the net) not an option really. They'll find a way to put that kind of stuff on there, no matter what. You just click out of it"

(Empty Nesters/ Singles, 50-60, C2DE, Heavier Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Watford)

Because of its size, lack of structure and the ease with which one can accidentally end up on a potentially disturbing site, users felt it was absolutely imperative that surfers should take responsibility for learning to use the internet, and learn to use it well. They argued that it was no-one's responsibility to teach them about the internet, but that it was inevitably something they'd have to learn themselves. Even the schoolchildren within the sample argued that although it was helpful to have lessons to 'fast-track' them to good sites and to teach them how to use a browser, they had to find their own way of mastering the internet. Both adults and children felt that education about chat rooms and information on how to behave when visiting chat rooms was readily available, and generally promoted. Parents tended to feel that they were the 'learners' when it came to the internet, and that their responsibility as parents was to try to educate their children on appropriate behaviour generally, rather than try to ban them from specific sites. They also suspected, rather strongly, that if they tried to ban their children from certain sites, a) their children would find a way to get to those sites anyway, and b) their ban would make those sites much more appealing to them.

"They're much smarter than we are, as soon as we'd find a way to stop them, they'd find a way round it. It's like with films, they just go to their pal's house and watch it there. All you can do is try and educate them, then it's up to them"

(Parents, 20-35, C2DE, Lighter Internet Usage, Non-User BBC Online, Edinburgh)

For both parents and children, chat rooms seemed to be waning in terms of their appeal, since they all expressed a preference for chatting with their friends via MSN or AOL. This is also likely to have had an impact on parental concerns about their children's use of the internet.

"We used to go on chat rooms, but now we just do MSN.... It's not so boring, 'cos it's just the people you want to talk to"

(Male, C2DE, Year 9, Edinburgh)

Some older people had attended courses on the internet and how to use it, however, as with the schoolchildren, they argued that it had provided useful pointers for starting out, rather than giving them a good understanding of the internet, or guide to the internet.

"I did go to a course to start with, which helped, but most of it's down to you"

(Empty Nesters/ Singles, 60+ , BC1, Lighter Internet Usage, Non-User BBC Online, Hollywood)

Indeed the idea of a 'guide' to the internet was a strange one for respondents : they felt that every individual would have different interests at different stages of their lives.

"I've never read those books ("Dummies Guide to the Internet" type books). I think you have to find out for yourself. There's so much there that you kind of customise it for yourself"

(Pre-family, 26-40, BC1, Lighter Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Watford)

They felt that both choice and therefore individual responsibility underpinned their web usage. This was partly because it tended to be a very private experience (and thus one which avoided the embarrassment of clicking into an inappropriate site with a different generation in your family). It was also partly because they felt that part of the point of the internet was that everything was on the internet, therefore one could not, and should not, stand in judgement of what was available via the web. How much this was because they also felt that it was impossible to control what was on the internet was difficult to judge, because they took this so much for granted. Any prescription about the internet was always made in the context of other people's young children – although there was a broad fatalism about the inevitability of finding ways around bans, censorship or 'nanny' functions in browsers.

To summarise then: they tended to expect that the quality and type of web experience they had was down to them, their interests and competence in browsing. They argued that the web would have content on whatever they were interested in as well as what they were not interested in, and that it was up to them to carve a way through the web to what they wanted from it. There was also a resistance therefore, to having a 'guide', particularly a 'safe and trusted' guide to the internet. It was judged to be inappropriate, as it limited and restricted their use of the net, and contradicted the 'point' of the web. Indeed some, particularly young people, enjoyed testing the limits of the web : it was almost seen as a rite of passage.

6.1.2. Learning to Use the Internet : Building up a Set of Regular Sites

Although there were many smaller points of difference, a definite pattern emerged when analysing how respondents had learned, or were learning, to use the internet. When they first started going on-line they were mentally prepared to spend some considerable time browsing with no aim in mind except *"to see what's there"*. They tended to be tentative in their usage, and expressed nervousness that they would do something wrong.

"It's that pull out the plug and start again moment"

(Parents, 20-35, C2DE, Lighter Internet Usage, Non-User BBC Online, Edinburgh)

Some were being guided and assisted in the early days by their children, partners, friends or parents, who were helping direct them to sites they themselves had found useful, or showing the basics of navigation (how to link, the difference between a browser and a website, the 'back' button).

"If there's a good site, it'll be round the school pretty quickly"

(Male, BC1, Year 12, Newcastle)

The biggest, and most powerful driver of use of a website or a browser at this stage was whether it delivered the information they were looking for. There was very little criticism of navigational difficulties, or design faults : their one main criteria tended to be, does it have the information I want. Indeed, they were very forgiving of poor navigation and site design at this stage, partly because they didn't want to have to search for an alternative site. Thus, those sites which helped them explore the internet more deeply or extensively, were all the sites on which they'd searched successfully.

"As you go through it, you notice other bits"

(Male, BC1, Year 12, Newcastle)

The only navigational issue important at this stage was how many clicks they needed to get to what they were looking for : and the fewer the better. Thus, if they developed a sense of being in control, of being successful in their searching, they were much more likely to become heavier users. Those who were still lighter and occasional users often claimed this was because they were *"not very good at it"*.

"I'd use it more if I knew what I was doing"

(Empty Nesters/ Singles, 50-60, BC1, Lighter Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Edinburgh)

"I'm nervous about the internet, so I might not use it much. It's not my PC, I'm afraid of breaking it, so I just go to the same things"

(Female, BC1, A level/ FE College, Holywood)

The next stage was reached by building up a core set of sites which were regularly used. By this stage all of the respondents had made many mistakes and ended up in sites they didn't want to be on, thereby wasting time, and so they had become more cautious of *"just browsing"* or exploring for exploring's sake. At this point they tended to take on a robustly goal-oriented view of their time on the internet, and they tended only to *"explore"* or browse when they couldn't find what they wanted on their usual site. This core set of sites tended to be for specific tasks : news, weather reports, discount travel booking, sports, music and children's/ teens dedicated pages. That is, their 'core' sites that they went to directly tended to have justification over and above the website. They would visit BBC News to *"get up to date"* and because they trusted BBC's news *per se*. They would visit the discount travel booking sites who had given them the best deals in the past : Ryannair, Easyjet, Travelocity, Expedia, Ebookers etc.. They would visit the sports site of their favourite team as well as the sports news site. Thus, the web became almost two separate entities : the sites they knew, visited regularly and had a relationship with – which were often used in a very utilitarian way (*"to get the fixtures"*, *"to book the cheapest ticket to x"*); and the rest of the web, which was often a vague blank in their perceptions.

"When I know that it is going to be able to help me I'm there... otherwise you go where it is easiest"

(Parents, 35-50, C2DE, Heavier Internet Usage, Non-User BBC Online, Cardiff)

6.1.3. Learning to Use the Internet : The Specific Role of the Search Engine

The search engine was absolutely key for all respondents' use of the internet. It was almost a 'wrapper' for the internet, and was certainly the tool that 'organised' the web for them, inasmuch as the web had any organisation for them.

"If I can't find something on Google, it's probably not worth looking for"
(Male, BC1, Year 12, Newcastle)

The search engine reflected the values of the internet – it took them directly to exactly, and only, what they wanted. However, because the search engine went through the whole of the web, it was also valued for giving them "unfettered" choice. Interestingly, these internet users were not particularly interested in the site the engine led them to – except to help evaluate the quality of the information it had led them to. Certainly once they had found the information they were looking for, they were unlikely to spend further time on that particular website, browsing to see what else was available there. Whilst this was the case with almost all respondents, it was particularly the case with those who had a dial-up rather than broadband connection.

"If you're on there to find out something, then you're not going to waste your time waiting for the home page to load so you can see what other exciting things you can do on that site, you get on with what you're doing"
(Pre-family, 26-40, C2DE, Heavier Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Glasgow)

"I only use the one at home if I need to. I go to my dad's if I want to do anything that takes time. He's got the cable one"
(Pre-family, 26-40, BC1, Heavier Internet Usage, Non-User BBC Online, Glasgow)

Interestingly, search engines have a synergy with their description of their lifestyles : they felt they were 'the' generation (across the generations) which was the most time poor and who therefore needed to get the most from the internet in the shortest time possible. They described the many different people wanting to use the home computer; ...

"I only get on it when the children have finished"
(Parents, 35-50, BC1, Lighter Internet Usage, Non-User BBC Online, Wimbledon)

... and thus appreciated the search engine's flexibility as well as speed. Finally, they liked that it demanded so little expertise and learning from them as users : they described it as a simple way of filtering the vast amount of irrelevant and unwanted information out of their field of vision.

"If I'm on there I'm on to do something specific, I've got a little bit of time to do what I want before I have to get off for them"
(Parents, 20-35, C2DE, Heavier Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Port Talbot)

The search engine was the default way of navigating beyond the 'core' set of sites used. If they were unsuccessful in their searches, then some reported having to browse to try to find what they wanted – but they felt this was a wasteful and unwelcome way of 'searching' when compared with the average search engine. Some reported having to browse around the links suggested by the search engine in order to find exactly what they wanted, however again this was seen as frustrating.

Finally, the search engine was liked partly because of its serendipitous effect. That is, almost all respondents had clicked links provided by the search engine and been surprised and pleased because it had directed them to an unexpected, exciting, funny or even shocking page which they would not otherwise have come across.

"Rotten.com ... dead bodies ... eeee it's 'orrible"
(Male, C2DE, A level/ FE College, Holywood)

To summarise then, the search engine had become much more important to them than any one site, and had become the tool with which they interfaced with, and 'organised' the world wide web into their own, personal web.

6.1.4. Location of the Computer and Learning about the Internet

It should be borne in mind that the computer the majority were using for internet access was a shared one, and in the interviews with children it was clear that the list of favourites which the whole of the family had developed was unmanageable and odd. Parents' specialist interests, such as advanced needlework sites, would sit next to CBBC's Smile, so navigation via the favourites listing was rare. Most of the respondents were typing in the URL rather than navigating from lists or links.

Those accessing the internet in a work environment tended to have access only to a limited range of sites : for some BBC Online was the only internet site available at work. They tended to be very news-oriented in their web browsing – partly because they felt this was the only internet access or 'browsing' they could justify at work, but partly because they were even less interested in genuine browsing at work.

"It's (The BBC site) OK if the boss sees you on it"
(Pre-family, 18-25, BC1, Heavier Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Newcastle)

The younger people and children who were accessing the internet at school or in college also reported having limited access in those contexts. Sometimes BBC Online was the only website available, but it was usually the one their teachers and lecturers were strongly recommending to them. Their usage of the site was very skewed towards news-sourcing (including archive news), and project-related information.

6.1.5. Implications of How People Use the Internet for BBC Online

When prompted about the 'purpose' of BBC Online, i.e. a portal/ guide to the internet, respondents struggled badly with the idea, since it didn't fit with their experience, and expectations of the web. This could be seen in the language that they naturally used when talking about the web. That is, respondents naturally used the language and concepts of "searches" - which to them was a process, and the language of concepts of "sites", i.e. what they ended up on once they had searched. However, no-one mentioned either the term 'portal' nor were they at ease with the concept when suggested. In grappling to understand the term, some of the more sophisticated respondents suggested we might mean a 'mini-web', or a 'jump off page', however they found both concepts difficult (as they contradict the point of the web and the current way that they used it) or irrelevant (as they suggest a usage they didn't want). The idea of a 'portal', when understood, implied a more difficult, cumbersome relationship with the web than they had, or wanted.

They did, however, use some of the links on regularly used home pages to access services. These were principally Yahoo, Freeserve, AOL, NTL and Lycos, and they had learned to use them in this way because they had been set up as their homepage for their browser when the service had been installed. Those who were using those links tended to use them for access to news, sports, weather, TV listings and horoscopes, and purely as a means of avoiding having to bookmark the sites separately or remember the URL.

" Yeah, I use Yahoo's links for news and sport. It was on the PC when I got it, so I just got used to using them"

(Parents, 35-50, BC1, Heavier Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Hollywood)

As a concept, BBC Online was felt to be trying to provide a service which was encouraging more linking, and thus trying to be more of a 'mini-web' or 'first stop on the web'. Certainly the younger people in particular, but also adults after viewing the site, felt that it did seem to have much of what they used on the wider web. However, because of the difficulty they had with the idea of a portal, they were very unclear about why BBC Online wasn't just another website, even after being taken through the site by the researchers. The issue here is that even after prompting BBC Online as a portal, users reject and are very uncomfortable with the idea. Where they felt there was potential (after much discussion and exposure to the site and what it allowed users to do), was in using BBC Online to re-schedule and re-edit what was available generally, i.e. rather than being a portal, it had the potential to allow them to become their own director or scheduler. However, this was felt to be a) different to how the BBC was currently promoting its site; b) more than a search engine and more than a website – but what it was they were rather unclear about.

Currently most users and non-users saw the BBC's site as a collection of mini-sites, and judged it on that basis. This was mostly because this was the way they viewed the web itself : as a series of sites, associated with specific needs or interests.

One or two lighter internet users, who also tended to be among the older respondents within the sample, were using the BBC website as a portal ...

"It's my homepage, I use it for everything"
(Empty Nesters/ Singles, 60+ , BC1, Lighter Internet Usage, Non-User BBC Online, Hollywood)

... but none would spontaneously use the term and few would recognise the concept of a portal when it was outlined to them.

6.2. Expectations and Perceptions of BBC Online

6.2.1. A Word on Terminology

Almost no-one used the term 'BBCi or BBC Online' spontaneously. Those in London and the South East had some awareness of BBC Online meaning the BBC's website, however they were more likely to associate BBCi with digital Ceefax services, or as they called them, *"the stuff you get with the red button"*. A few deduced 'i' to stand for interactivity, and so assumed that meant all BBC output which had an interactive element – by which they usually meant you could choose what you wanted to see (for instance, which match at Wimbledon, or which frame of the World Snooker Championships).

(On being shown the logo) *"Oh, I hadn't noticed that before"*
(Parents, 35-50, C2DE, Lighter Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Newcastle)

Amongst the vast majority of the sample, the terminology used was *"the BBC's website"*, or *"bbc.co.uk"*. They never referred to it as anything other than *"a website"*, and similarly, they tended to feel that they were *"using"* or were simply *"on"* the website, not interacting with it in different ways. Interactivity was not a meaningful, commonly defined term, and generally users felt most comfortable with the idea that they were *"browsing"* different parts within the site, not changing the way they were interacting with it (e.g. streaming audio or video, completing a competition, or downloading music).

"I just used the address, it's not like you need another name for it"
(Pre-family, 18-25, BC1, Heavier Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Newcastle)

"It's such a short address, there's no need to bookmark it"
(Male, C2DE, A level/ FE College, Hollywood)

6.2.2. Finding out about the BBC Website

Young people and children tended to have found out about the website in different ways from adults. They usually first heard about the site (bbc.co.uk) through teachers' recommendation. They had often searched and used the news archives for project work, and had found specific information, sub-sites (particularly science- and politics- related) and sections for particular information.

"That's what they say (teachers), go to the BBC website first, they're bound to have information on citizenship"
(Male, BC1, Year 8, Watford)

"My teacher says its really good, I use it all the time now, especially for doing history homework"

(Female, C2DE, Year 10, Birmingham)

Most knew about Bitesize (either from having been at GCSE level themselves or having older brothers/ sisters or simply hearing about it on the grapevine), and pupils in Wales had heard about the Welsh language material, but it was not only the education-related and project-related material which had been accessed. Many of the younger age range were using CBBC, particularly Smile, and the older ones were using the Teens site, or specific interests sites – particularly music-related ones. Finally, many had also picked up specific programme-related sites through TV and on air promotion of the URL.

"I use it all the time for Welsh... there isn't really anywhere else for us anyway"

(Male,, C2DE, Year 11, Cardiff)

"If you have problems like they have on Eastenders, it says go to bbc.co.uk/ da da da ... not that I've had those problems!"

(Female, C2DE, Year 12, Leeds)

Adults, on the other hand, were much more likely to have picked up a URL reference at the end of an enjoyed, usually regularly viewed, programme. The small proportion who had been through formal internet 'training' or induction tended to have had bbc.co.uk recommended to them. Further, those with restricted access to the internet at work tended to have explored it, since it was one of few, if not the only, site(s) they could source at work.

It was interesting that those who had discovered a part of bbc.co.uk through a search engine didn't think to bookmark it. They tended to go through the information they had come to the site wanting, and then had moved on without having looked around the site or having bookmarked that particular page.

Some had bbc.co.uk as their home page, chosen by someone else who had set up their browser. Interestingly, those who had chosen a BBC-related home page, tended to have their specific interest as the home page (news, BBC Radio 3, BBC Radio 4, sports).

"He set me up with his old one when he got a new laptop for university. He set it for the BBC website...I think he did it so I wouldn't ask him questions all the time"

(Empty Nesters/ Singles, 50-60 , BC1, Heavier Internet Usage, Non-User BBC Online, Sutton Coldfield)

For both adults and children, regardless of how they had technically got to the site, they tended to have accessed it for one of the following three reasons :
a) as a source of information or help with school, education or adult learning;
b) through a specific interest as expressed in a programme; or c) because they expected that the BBC would be a respected and good source of information in that area. Thus, they might access the foreign news site because of the reputation of BBC overseas correspondents; or the antiques

site because of the number of programmes that the BBC has on antiques-related topics; however there was little general expectation that the BBC's site would contain much information on health, because users didn't tend to associate BBC with health-related topics.

6.2.3. Expectations and Perceptions of the Website

When asked to talk about the BBC's website, respondents tended to think of either 'the BBC's corporate website', or of the 2-3 sub-sites they had seen or used. There was very little idea of the site in overall terms, rather, they thought of it as a collection of smaller sites. The ones most frequently mentioned spontaneously were news, sports, weather, and specific interest/programme related sites. Younger people and children tended to mention fun, education, information/ archive material as well as programme interests, and for both adults and children, the dominating perception was of programme-related material.

"I just thought it would be about their programmes, you see it all the time on the telly, BBC dot dot Eastenders, that's not what I'm looking for on the internet"

(Parents, 35-50, C2DE, Lighter Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Newcastle)

Users felt that the site (or the bits of the site they knew and used), was very, very good, containing a mass of information, some education and an element of information. However, few spontaneously suspected that this would be replicated in areas outside of those they were familiar with, or beyond the specialisms they associated with the BBC's output. Once the moderator in each group had taken the group through unfamiliar elements of the site, their perceptions were of a superb quality site, with an amazing breadth and depth of information, education and fun, as well as having opportunities for re-scheduling and customising.

For non-users or very light users, expectations were that the BBC, or BBC programmes would have (a) very good site(s), but that the main users would be viewers of specific programmes. Thus, if they weren't viewers of programmes promoting their www. address, they hadn't visited the site. They also hadn't come across the site on their searches (presumably because they were not clicking BBC links because they expected them to be very BBC-programme related and specific). Most non-users expected the BBC's site to be "very PC", or "straight", "establishment", and even "toeing the government line", however after the group surf, all the non-users felt surprised that this was not the case. They felt that the site portrayed, and portrayed fairly, a balance and variety of views; they felt that there was a genuine even-handedness, and that the site didn't push any particular view – certainly not the BBC view.

When using the search function in the group surf to look up MMR –

"I bet it just gives the Government line... Oh no ... look at that .. it seems to be giving you both sides of the argument .. that's good that is"

(Parents, 35-50, C2DE, Lighter Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Newcastle)

Finally, they were also surprised that the site included information on non-BBC programmes, such as Coronation St, and Emmerdale.

Even after the group surf, the overriding impression amongst all respondents was of a series of websites, rather than 'a' service or portal.

"I can't believe that they have so many different websites...it is quite amazing really... but I do think they should be bringing them altogether"
(Parents, 20-35, BC1, Lighter Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Birmingham)

6.2.4. BBC Online Versus Other Sites

Each of the sites was well regarded, particularly amongst users of those sites. They were judged to have a high level of knowledge and expertise behind their production. The feeling was that real experts in the subject areas had worked on those sites, and that further, the BBC had used its presentation expertise in the presentation of those sites. They felt that each of the sites compared very well with the best alternatives, however they were judging the sites site by site. They found it very difficult to talk about the site as a whole, however when they started to pick out what they felt were the shared features between sub-sites, they tended to start to identify traditional BBC values. When they thought about the site as a whole, then the sheer range of topics covered within bbc.co.uk was felt to be unique, although what the value of the uniqueness at this level would be, they were unsure. This is because the idea of a 'comprehensive', 'unique', 'one stop shop' site didn't reflect their usage of the internet. Rather, they used sites regularly because of a specific interest. Within this context they tended to visit a number of sites because they were interested in a subject. Thus a sports fan might visit bbc.co.uk/sports, the official website of the team/ sport they were interested in, and perhaps one or two unofficial sites of the same team or sport. Thus the idea of bbc.co.uk being 'unique' or 'essential' was odd to them – even although they judged the site (or sub-site) to be excellent.

“You can't get everything you want from one place can you, it's like a relationship isn't it, you got your mates you have a laugh with and then you come home to your wife”

(Pre-family, 26-40, C2DE, Lighter Internet Usage, Non-User BBC Online, Sutton Coldfield)

6.2.5. Current Usage of BBC Online

The heaviest adult users tended to be news and sports site users. They tended to access them very regularly, partly because the high value they placed on them was because they were judged to be the best at keeping them right up to date (even when they're not near a television or radio).

Radio site users tended to be the most heavy users of streaming.

The heaviest use amongst young people and children tended to be education-related (e.g. Bitesize, homework/ college work information) and CBBC's Smile and Teen sites.

Those using the programme-related or interest-related sites felt that they had a very BBC feel to them. There was clearly content which was based on the BBC programmes, however, particularly after the accompanied surf, most respondents expressed surprise at the depth and breadth of information available on those sites. However, although they were felt to be unique in the sense of being related to particular programmes, the content was not generally judged to be unique *per se*. Respondents compared the content with what was available in special interest magazines, and other special interest sites. Thus, after the group surf, respondents tended to judge the sub-sites as very good quality, in-depth sites, but not 'unique'.

Part of the users' perceptions of the site as a 'big collection of smaller sites' was that they were not using the home page as a guide to the site. Indeed they found it very difficult to build up a sense of what the overall site was like. They were using bbc.co.uk purely as a URL to use to try to negotiate their way to what they were interested in. They tended to find that, and go straight on to where they wanted to be, rather than take a view of the site as a whole as represented on the home page. Further, they found the home page very confusing. They described it as jumbled, illogical, and difficult to find your way around. Thus, they wanted to move off the page as quickly as possible; they didn't browse the page; and thus didn't build up a sense of a 'guide' to the site. As mentioned previously, they tended to want to bookmark the specific sub-site of interest.

"I just start typing the address and let the browser finish"
(Pre-family, 18-25, BC1, Heavier Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Newcastle)

"There's so much to look at and it's still dull"
(Pre-family, 18-25, BC1, Lighter Internet Usage, Non-User BBC Online, Cardiff)

Another reason they were not building up a sense of the 'whole' of the site was that they were not using the search function. Interestingly the majority thought that the search engine was only for the BBC's website, even although they had been using it on a page where the default setting was for a web search. More importantly, users and non-users could not understand why they would want to use the BBC's web search tool rather than their usual and familiar search engine.

"I didn't even notice that [different search options] I thought it was only for the site"
(Parents, 35-50, C2DE, Heavier Internet Usage, Non-User BBC Online, Cardiff)

The 'Where I live' section was highly valued by a small group, who felt that the kind of detail, resource and expertise which the BBC could apply locally was actually unique. They also felt that part of that expertise was a strength in presentation skills which only the BBC could have at that local level.

"If you look at the local newspaper's site, or the council's site, they're really tacky in comparison. That's really professionally done"
(Pre-family, 26-40, BC1, Heavier Internet Usage, Non-User BBC Online, Glasgow)

"I use it all the time, there's a lot more going on around here than you think. Swansea is quite good for clubs too"
(Parents, 20-35, C2DE, Heavier Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Port Talbot)

There was a very small group within the sample who had built up more of a sense of bbc.co.uk, often because it had been set up as their homepage –

typically at work. Others had come to this usage through exposure to the site early in their surfing experience, or who were young people who had been directed to the site over and over again by their teachers. This group used the search function to search the web generally, and tended to check out what bbc.co.uk said about what they were looking for before going to another site.

“I use it for everything, it’s brilliant – we sail a lot so I check out all the places we might be going to see what’s there.

(Parents, 35-50, BC1, Heavier Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Hollywood)

They had also started exploring elsewhere on the site and on the web via links. However, although they thought of bbc.co.uk as a group or suite of linked sites, there was little sense of it being a ‘guide’, or ‘safe environment’.

6.3. Reflecting on BBC Online – Findings from Prompted Reviews of BBC Online

6.3.1. Prompted Discussion of BBC Online

After being shown a wider range of what BBC Online offered, via the group surf, respondents felt that the site reflected what they considered traditional BBC values. There was a basic expectation that one should be able to have higher expectations of the BBC, partly because it was publicly funded, but also because of its history of excellence in broadcasting. Certainly all the respondents felt that the site was and looked to be of high quality. They judged this in the context of how clear, credible, in depth, and interesting each of the sub-sites was.

“It’s very well separated, the pictures and the writing”

(Empty Nesters/ Singles, 50-60, BC1, Lighter Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Edinburgh)

They also described it as very professional, in terms of being both well presented (i.e. good to look at), and also in the context of it being well balanced (presenting both sides of an argument).

There was a general perception that the information presented on the website was both expert and knowledgeable. Indeed there was a sense that the BBC must gather enormous amounts of information when preparing programmes, knowledge which was made much more accessible via BBC Online.

“Information is what the BBC is good at, you’d expect it to be after all this time...it’s good that it isn’t wasted by just being shown on the TV or Radio. I mean, even I can get at it now”

(Empty Nesters/ Singles, 60+, C2DE, Lighter Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Birmingham)

The information presented on the website was also generally judged to be independent, and because it was not commercially driven, for the most part impartial and objective. They felt that user-driven information available via the website was less subject to “spin”, compared with packaged and presented information which was broadcast.

One of the most appealing elements of BBC Online was its accessibility. Indeed they felt that the site was written in 'real' English rather than jargon, and that it was easy to read.

"The BBC is a communications company so you expect it to communicate well. This is just another way that they're doing that"

(Pre-family, 26-40, BC1, Heavier Internet Usage, Non-User BBC Online, Glasgow)

Trustworthy was another term used to describe the site. Respondents felt that the information presented in the site was, and would be, generally accurate, fair and balanced. They also felt that the information chosen to be included in the site would be chosen with the family in mind, except where the programme it was related to was more adult in nature (e.g. Chewin' the Fat, Absolutely Fabulous, the Comedy section). Another element of 'family-oriented' was that it had content which was specifically aimed at children, and which was both engaging and helpful (in the sense of providing information, advice and education-related material).

A surprising term which spontaneously emerged when describing the site was "*British*". Respondents used this term to indicate that the site reflected what they called "*traditional British values*", i.e. fairness, even-handedness, and quality, as well as in the context of being one of the largest, and best, British sites on the *worldwide* web.

So, in terms of the mission to inform, educate and entertain, respondents felt that it both educated and informed in an entertaining way, and that its strength was in the range of information contained in the site. Interestingly one of the elements of the site that was felt to be almost 'unique' (not a word respondents spontaneously used when judging websites), was in the context of providing education-related material that was of such high quality, so tightly related to the curriculum, and in such an entertaining way.

"We'd been set an essay about a book we were doing in English (Of Mice and Men). I was stuck, didn't have a clue how to do it but when I looked in Bitesize it came up with everything – context, plot, content ... everything"

(Male, BC1, Year 12, Newcastle)

The issues which emerged in discussion of the website were not to do with the quality and range of what was available on the website. Rather, they were to do with the problem of not knowing what's in the site, and not being drawn into the site to explore what else was available. Further, respondents – both users and non-users – found the navigation difficult, and reported having been lost within the site.

A key issue with the site was that they were not really able to see the what the site as a whole was trying to achieve. As mentioned previously, they perceived BBC Online as a range of databases related to specific programmes. However, after the group surf, they felt disappointed that the site had not been promoted as more than just programme related, follow up information, but more as a comprehensive resource. Thus, they argued, and

argued strongly, that the BBC should be promoting the site and how to use it far more actively.

“Why haven’t they told us about this?”

(Parents, 20-35, BC1, Heavier Internet Usage, Non-User BBC Online, Leeds)

This was true of all respondents, even those who had spontaneously raised objections to BBC cross-promotion and brand promotion.

“They should be spending our money telling us what an amazing resource there is on the website... Not on whizzing wheelchairs”

(Empty Nesters/ Singles, 50-60, BC1, Lighter Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Edinburgh)

Some respondents went as far as suggesting that the BBC should make short films for use on-air to demonstrate the potential and range of the site. This was particularly the case with non-users, who felt astonished that they’d missed such a potentially interesting and valuable site, and who wanted to know more about how to make use of it.

“There is so much stuff on there that we didn’t know about. The Homepage doesn’t help, ... no the main thing is to get this known about first.”

(Pre-family, 18-25, BC1, Heavier Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Newcastle)

“I am paying for that (BBC Online) and not using it, why don’t they try and bring in a wider audience? If they don’t do it they are wasting our money”

(Pre-family, 18-25, BC1, Lighter Internet Usage, Non-User BBC Online, Cardiff)

There were some issues which emerged in discussion which were related to the content of the site. Not surprisingly, these were also related to traditional perceptions of the BBC generally, but were felt to be reflected in some elements of the site. First, the site was felt to feel rather *“establishment”* in the sense of not being cutting edge, being too safe. By this they meant that BBC Online would not be the first site to try things out, or to push out the edges of what might be acceptable, and that BBC Online would always contain safer, and less controversial images and text than, for instance, Channel 4 or 5’s websites.

Respondents also felt that the search engine, once explained, would never take them to the kind of range of information, surprise them or take them to *“near the edge”* material in the sense of what might be acceptable to a mainstream audience, that Google, for instance, would.

Young people made a very specific criticism of the non-children related material; they felt that fonts, layout and volume of information was very *“formal”*.

“I mean, look at it .. the colours .. it’s so boring”

(Female, C2DE, Year 12, Leeds)

However, within CBBC and the Teens section, they felt that the approach was far more suited to them.

“It’s quite funky for the BBC, I wouldn’t have expected it to look like this”
(Male, BC1, Year 10, Sutton Coldfield)

It was interesting that although respondents associated the BBC with modernity and excellence, they found it hard to accept that the BBC would be at the forefront of digital technology. This was for two very specific reasons. First, they associated digital or technological innovation with ‘hardware’ companies such as Intel and Sony, or with Channel 4 in the context of broadcasting. The second was that they associated new technology with bugs and problems. They expected that the BBC would only adopt a technology once those bugs and problems had been ironed out. Thus, they could associate the BBC with bringing new technologies into the mainstream, but not with ‘cutting edge’. An example of this was the streaming options on BBC Online. Even those who used this facility on BBC Online, and who hadn’t noticed or used the option on any other site hadn’t thought it to be a technology BBC had brought to them (or brought to them first). Thus, they contrasted the values they associated with the BBC (tried and tested), with ‘innovative’ in this context (whacky, bizarre, and risky).

“The BBC is not about innovation, it’s safe, it’s about getting it right”
(Empty Nesters/ Singles, 60+, C2DE, Lighter Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Birmingham)

6.3.2. Reflecting on the Search Function after Prompting

Almost all respondents within the sample were using Google most regularly for their searching, and could not spontaneously see why they would want to use BBC Online to search rather than Google. Almost all assumed that the BBC Online search function would only be searching BBC Online, even those who had used the search and found themselves ‘outside’ BBC Online.

The researchers therefore tried to explain the ‘uniqueness’ or ‘different-ness’ of the search function (as defined by the BBC), which proved quite difficult, since respondents resisted anything which made their searching more complicated or required them to think about searching. This reflected their current usage of the search engine : to type in what they want and to be thrown a huge range of links. They also found it hard per se to understand why a site, which was not a search engine, would give them a search function which allowed them to search the whole of the web. Because their expectations were that the search function was of the BBC Online site, they tended to use it in that way, or ignore it.

The researchers tried to explore the value of ‘only UK’ with respondents, and although they thought that a search function which restricted the links to UK only ones was useful, they claimed they already had this function with Google. Many claimed to have been caught out the first few times they had surfed, and had ended up with tens of thousands of listed links, only 1 of which had been in the UK, and had therefore learned to use that function very quickly.

The idea of 'BBC Online recommended' sites was a difficult one for respondents, particularly where the site recommended was not a BBC one. Indeed their default expectation was that the list of 'BBC Online recommended' sites would always feature BBC sites within BBC Online, but when shown the range of BBC Online recommended sites, they were very uncomfortable with the idea of 'BBC' and 'recommended' being applied to commercial sites. They felt that if the BBC was actively recommending commercial sites, then it put into question their impartiality.

"Does that mean they get paid by them?"

(Pre-family, 18-25, C2DE, Heavier Internet Usage, Non-User BBC Online, Hollywood)

After reflecting on the idea of the BBC evaluating sites in advance for them, most felt that it was a good idea *"in principle"*, *"for other people"*, but that part of the fun of the internet for them personally was making their own searches and taking their own risks.

"You don't have to click on the link, it's your choice"

(Parents, 35-50, C2DE, Lighter Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Newcastle)

If any of the users were to be persuaded to start using the BBC Online search function however, they would have to be told what the advantage, for them, of the function was over Google in particular.

"I think we're all so used to Google, and it's so simple, why would you want to change?"

(Empty Nesters/ Singles, 50-60, C2DE, Heavier Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Watford)

6.3.3. Reflecting on the Home Page after Prompting

It was interesting that users only mentioned the Home Page spontaneously as their route to getting to what they were looking for (news, sports, Eastenders). Some had missed the page completely as they were accessing BBC Online via their special interest, or because they were accessing their interest, e.g. 'Eastenders' via Google.

There was a general perception after viewing the Home Page and reflecting on their use of it, that the Home Page was not helpful. Both users and non-users of BBC Online felt that this page in particular was dull, busy, with too much information. The users were going to the left hand side of the page to find the links they wanted, but all argued that there was no real structure or 'sense' to the page.

"I go down and click on News and that's it. I don't really look at anything else"

(Pre-family, 18-25, C2DE, Lighter Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Hollywood)

Indeed the news users felt that the news Home Page was a far better example of what they expected from a Home Page : i.e. clear headlines with

links to further information; clear navigation via the left hand column; and a good mixture of graphics and text.

The term 'categories' did not make sense to the vast majority of the sample, and thus they found the list confusing and had used search engines to find what they were looking for within the site. The few that had used the 'categories' tended to be younger and had been directed there by their teachers.

The grey bar across the top had not been spontaneously noticed, and even regular users were unclear about what the titles might mean. Certainly it was not encouraging further use of the site: the terms were not clear, which was particularly important because it is the main form of shared navigation. Thus, users were ignoring it, and using other means of navigating the site, and non-users found it extremely confusing and off-putting.

As a whole, the Home Page failed to either give users an idea of what the site was and could do; the navigation was unclear; and the terms used not understood. This may be a crucial factor in the respondents' persisting perception of BBC Online as a collection of interesting, but mini-sites, rather than a coherent whole.

"It shouts boring"

(Female, BC1, Year 11, Port Talbot)

6.3.4. Reflecting on 'Where I Live' after Prompting

Very few users were aware of, or used 'Where I Live'. Some heavier users reported having tried that link, but being unable to get to the information they had wanted, or hadn't found the information they had obtained useful.

Once the respondents had been shown this element of the site, they were critical of the route to finding it : they felt it was far too confusing (after putting in the postcode, the screen that appears seems to be asking for the postcode again), and they found it too easy to get lost.

However, those who were regular users of the feature tended to value it very highly indeed. They felt that it was an extremely effective, efficient and user-friendly way of finding out about their local area.

"I use it to keep up with the junior football (in the area)"

(Male, BC1, Year 12, Newcastle)

Non-users and users were both staggered by the quantity of information the site provided at the very local level, and most concluded that only an organisation with the infrastructure and funding of the BBC would be able to provide this depth at a local level.

"That's great (local music listings) I had no idea you could get this"
(Parents, 20-35, BC1, Heavier Internet Usage, Non-User BBC Online, Leeds)

There was some feeling that this local information should be provided across the site within special interests: so for instance, open days in gardens should be provided within the gardening site; local cinema listings should be provided within the arts/ review section etc.

Respondents compared this element of the site with their local newspaper, and found several advantages in the site over their local paper. First, they felt that for those who did not want to read the local news in any depth, the site gave the user the chance to find the tiniest piece of information they were looking for in a more direct way. Second, all argued that the site was very well presented indeed in comparison with their local paper itself, and certainly with their local paper's site. However, there were a group of respondents, typically older respondents, who had a high degree of affection and regard for their local paper. For them reading the same kind of information on-line was anathema.

"Politics .. Oh God, no more politics puh..lease (Northern Ireland)"
(Empty Nesters/ Singles, 60+ , BC1, Lighter Internet Usage, Non-User BBC Online, Hollywood)

6.3.5. Specific Feedback on Petals : News

Opinions of the news section were very high indeed : both amongst users prior to and after the prompted surf, and amongst non-users after the prompted surf.

The lay-out, navigation and 'logic' of the petal were praised very highly. They felt that it was very clear to see, and provided the kind of overview, "*at a glance*" picture which they valued on the web. This allowed them to 'drill down' to the information of particular interest, whilst giving the overview of the whole range of what was being covered. This kind of self-editing was very highly valued by users, and contributed to them feeling that they were very much in control of their surfing, and actively consuming what they wanted to read about/ see/ hear, when they wanted to read/ see/ hear it.

"For me this is what the internet is about, putting me in control of the information"
(Empty Nesters/ Singles, 60+, BC1, Heavier Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Port Talbot)

The left hand column was judged to be very clear, gave an exact indication of where they were within the site at any one point, and allowed them to move around quickly and efficiently within the site. As mentioned previously, many contrasted this navigation tool with the 'grey bar' which the rest of the site used.

They argued that the content was nicely varied, and that there was always something lighter to follow, if the main news had depressed them. The 'quality' of the news coverage was always praised, even amongst non-BBC news broadcast viewers.

"I don't watch the BBC 6 O'clock News, I watch the other side, but I use the BBC's news website because it's so good"

(Empty Nesters/ Singles, 50-60, C2DE, Heavier Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Watford)

Interestingly, users also spontaneously mentioned the value that the website could add to reports, because of the increased depth of reporting that it was perceived to offer. They argued that the website made the huge network of BBC correspondents much better value for money, since it gave them better, more regular access to broader and deeper reports from them. (This impression is reinforced by the 'region' navigation bar on the news page.) Thus, they felt that the news page made a valuable resource available to them "24/7".

Many had set it up as their home page, many others clicked to it immediately, so that it was almost their home page. However, their use of the news site was typical of their web usage more generally : i.e. for a specific purpose, in a utilitarian, objective-driven way, rather than for general browsing. Thus the news site was not encouraging them to explore other petals or parts of the site, they tended not to be in that 'browsing' frame of mind. Interestingly, those who were using streaming (Radio 4 's Today programme, specific news stories if they wanted to see the film rather than just read the story), tended to stay on the site longer.

For those accessing BBC Online at work, the news page tended to be one of their main uses of the site. Inasmuch as they were 'browsing' at work, they tended to be browsing the news pages.

Certainly the news site was seen to reflect the traditional strengths of the BBC generally, but added flexibility of scheduling, and the ability to edit for the user. The news archive was especially useful to those still at school or college who tended to search this for information concerning particular projects or work they had been set.

"They keep stuff for a while, not just today ... that's good for school work"

(Male, C2DE, A level/ FE College, Holywood)

Others were aware of the usage made of the news site by their ex-pat friends.

"We've got friends in Barbados, they're always on it"

(Parents, 35-50, C2DE, Lighter Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Newcastle)

All users would certainly miss the BBC Online news page if it were not available, however, again, they found it difficult to describe it as anything other than one of a number of news services available, so it was not in that sense 'unique'. Indeed, many users switched between news pages to compare the way that a specific story had been covered – particularly if the story involved the US. Thus they would switch between BBC's coverage and CNN's to try to build up a balanced picture of what had happened, or just to compare the US view with the UK. Other news pages used included Sky News, ITN, Channel 4 and Channel 5 (depending on the demographic of the user).

6.3.6. Specific Feedback on Petals : Sports

As with the news section, the sports section was very highly rated by users. They felt that the listings were excellent, that the reporting was of a very high quality, that the coverage was comprehensive, and that the tone was light, confident and the content was clear and easy to use.

This was a section of the site where users were interacting with the site – although they didn't describe it in that way. Thus, they were emailing into post-match discussions ...

“My dad and I were coming back in the car and I couldn’t get through on the phone, so I emailed it when I got back, and it was there”
(Male, BC1, Year 9, Glasgow)

... posting comments on comments boards, streaming interviews or missed coverage, having the latest ‘action’ windows open when at work or if on broadband, and even choosing which commentary to listen to. Interestingly some claimed to have the results sent to their mobiles from the BBC sports site – a service which it doesn’t offer, again underlining how interchangeable sites and services can be from the consumers’ point of view.

Unlike the use of the news section, sports fans tended to be in more ‘surfing’ mode when accessing BBC Sports. They used the site as one of a number, through which they would increase their understanding of what was happening generally in their sport, and in particular in relation to their team. They would access their team or sports main or official website (e.g. www.stmirren.net), a number of unofficial team sites (e.g. www.blackandwhitearmy.com) and other broadcasting sports sites (www.bbc.co.uk/fivelive/sport, www.skysports.com), however it didn’t seem to occur to most fans that the BBC’s sports website would have information on their specific team (http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/football/teams/s/st_mirren/default.stm), unless they had clicked to it via a browser, and then they tended not to credit BBC Online with having that level of information.

Whilst competitor sports news sites were also consulted occasionally, sports fans tended to be more interested in collating information at a specific level. Thus they would browse through the different sites covering their sport or team, rather than compare coverage across BBC Online, Sky etc.

Most sports fans were amazed and very impressed by the depth of information and coverage provided by BBC Online, particularly those who were fans of specialist sports. Thus, Formula 1 fans were surprised, and pleased, to find that BBC Online covered F1, although they associated F1 with ITV as a broadcaster. Similarly motorcycling fans were impressed with the coverage on BBC Online, but associated motorcycling television coverage with Sky.

“That looks good – everything that the MCN (Motorcycle News) site has, interesting lay out ... I just would never have thought the BBC would cover it .. well not in this detail anyway ... you don’t think of motorcycling as being big on the BBC”

(Pre-family, 18-25, C2DE, Lighter Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Hollywood)

6.3.7. Specific Feedback on Petals : Children’s

Parents, teachers and children all put a very high value on this petal, from Cbeebies through to Bitesize revision guides. However again their idea of what the ‘category’ contained tended to be unclear: they expected the children’s petal to include everything which was related to children – whether

from an entertainment point of view (Cbeebies/ Smile/ CBBC/ Teens etc) or from an educational point of view.

Parents rated the Cbeebies content highly, arguing that it provided educational material in a way which was great fun for their young children. They were using the games on-line, whilst others were printing out resources to use with their own children, or for those who worked with children, at work. The quality of what was available was rated highly.

"We use it for making things and ideas too, not just educational stuff.. we made some masks, they were really simple, brilliant. Just keep them away from the computer when you get the glitter out "

(Parents, 20-35, BC1, Lighter Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Birmingham)

CBBC was also praised by parents and younger teenagers, who tended to use Smile. Again the content was thought to be interesting and fun, although the children themselves felt that other sites gave them better games and CBBC didn't provide them with music downloads.

The Teen section was also used and liked by children, and approved of by parents. They accepted that the early teen years could be difficult, and that teenagers would want to explore the web for more 'edgy' content, and hoped that BBC Online would be covering topics such as "sex" and "pulling". Like some of the younger children, some Teen users were critical that the BBC Online site didn't have better games, however, like all other internet users, they wanted to go to specialist sites for the best of what was available, rather than have one site which served all their needs.

Interestingly, one of the main values of BBC Online's children and youth-oriented sections as far as parents were concerned, was that in using the site their children would become more comfortable with computers, and learn to interact with the internet. They felt that BBC Online helped achieve this by providing good content which was well presented and fun, and they felt that BBC Online should be lauded for providing this. Indeed most parents expressed the hope that their children would continue to find valuable and useful content on BBC Online as they got older.

The young people themselves felt that the coverage of BBC Online became more patchy after GCSEs and towards the end of secondary school. Certainly at the middle to older end of the teen years respondents were using the site for information and some education, but felt that it had nothing specifically targeted at them.

"I used to use it a lot but there's less for us now"

(Female, BC1, A level/ FE College, Hollywood)

They were going elsewhere for games, music downloads and interactivity. Some were accessing Radio 1 and 1Xtra sites, but most had acquired a fairly clear idea of BBC Online as being for education and information rather than fun, entertainment, or anything truly 'cool'.

"I suppose you get into other things once you've left school, find your own favourites .. you know, downloading music and stuff like that .. things you can't do on the BBC"

(Pre-family, 18-25, BC1, Heavier Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Newcastle)

Parents liked the 'staged' approach that CBBC took, as it helped reassure them that the content would be appropriate for specific age bands, however they were far less concerned about what their children were accessing on the net than they were about what they were watching on television.

6.3.8. Specific Feedback on Petals : Learning

This section was valued very highly by young people across the UK. There was some feeling that there was less targeted material for Scottish pupils, and there was some concern that the Northern Ireland curriculum was not fully supported, however both countries were delighted that there was at least some targeted information for them. In Wales the pupils were actively delighted that there was some Welsh language material. All reported having it recommended to them by their teachers at school, whilst many parents were recommending BBC Online generally when searching for information to help with homework and projects.

"We found out about the Welsh language section at school and now we use it all the time"

(Female, BC1, Year 11, Port Talbot)

"They even have a Welsh Bitesize... I like it that there is something there for you and it is easy for us to understand but they should have more because people like us find it quite hard to translate things into English"

(Male, C2DE, Year 11, Cardiff)

Users judged the site easy to use, fun and very, very relevant, particularly Bitesize, which they felt was a unique resource.

"It used to be Maths, Science and English, now it covers everything"

(Male, BC1, Year 12, Newcastle)

Few adults were aware of the 'Learning' section, except in relation to Bitesize. A few were aware that they could learn a language on-line, in fact a few within the sample had tried out the facility. However there was very little detailed knowledge or awareness of what was in the 'Learning' section, which tended to exercise respondents again into calling for the BBC to spend more time and money promoting its site – particularly useful and unusual parts of the site such as BBC Online Learning.

6.3.9. Specific Feedback on Petals : TV & Radio and Entertainment

The TV section was used primarily for listings and as such was praised on a number of levels. Users felt it was well organised and easy to navigate. However, the main barrier to use was that the listings were BBC only, which surprised the non-users of the section. Respondents argued that they didn't

choose what programme to watch having already decided that programme should be BBC; rather, they wanted a 'free' choice of what was available. Thus they tended to go to listings which were full listings (whether in print, listing magazines or alternative sites on the web).

Very few users reported using this page to link to particular programmes – either through the Home Page (particularly for Eastenders) or via a search engine.

Expectations of the TV and Radio section were that it would contain the kind of material which was actually in Entertainment, which added to their confusion about navigation and where they are within the site.

Generally the material related to specific programmes was liked a great deal, and was absolutely what they expected from the BBC's website. It helped them follow up specific interests, and added to their enjoyment of the programme. For some – particularly women - it was a way of catching up on programmes; an on-line celebrity magazine; and a source of entertainment news. For others it was a resource when looking for more information on drama and comedy. In Scotland there was much spontaneous talk of the 'Chewin the Fat' section which many of the pre-family groups had visited to follow up their enjoyment of the programme.

Interest in the Radio pages of BBC Online was very different to interest in the television programme related pages. Listeners tended to have a much stronger relationship with specific 'brands' or stations, and so tended to bookmark the station of interest. Their level of engagement with BBC Online at the level of their favourite station tended to be much stronger and have a more 'personal' element. Some even failed to make the connection between their favourite station and BBC Online.

"I haven't really visited the BBC's website ... (30 minutes later). I've got Radio 3 as my Home Page"

(Empty Nesters/ Singles, 50-60, BC1, Lighter Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Edinburgh)

Aside from the sports page, this was the only context in which users seemed to be streaming content regularly. They were using it to listen to interviews, catch up on missed programmes or shows, or just to have in the background when they had broadband but no radio. Interestingly within the groups this use of the site polarised respondents : some thought it was a wonderful idea and exactly the kind of thing they'd like to start exploring; others thought it was a bizarre idea, and that listening via the radio was a much simpler idea.

Those who were streaming didn't talk about 'interactivity' or a 'higher' level of interaction with the site: they were simply clicking on a link, which opened another 'page'. All argued that they weren't technological whiz-kids, but people who had just tried out a button, and become used to the choice it gave them.

Finally, whilst most users felt that there was an element of ‘the BBC’ on their favourite station’s site, they felt that the overriding feel of the station’s site was the station’s identity.

6.3.10. Specific Feedback on the Petals : Lifestyle

Respondents actively resisted the term 'lifestyle', expressing a degree of hatred for the term that was surprising.

"Lifestyle, what the hell's that. I like gardening, it's not my 'lifestyle'"
(Parents, 20-35, C2DE, Lighter Internet Usage, Non-User BBC Online, Edinburgh)

Many women actively sought out programmes on the BBC on such topics, and many had already used BBC Online to follow up interests sparked by the programme. Thus they had looked for copies of specific recipes to download; interrogated Gardening database for specific plants; and had downloaded DIY ideas and instructions. Interestingly, when in their section of interest, users had been in a 'browsing' mood, and they compared exploring these sites with reading a magazine on the subject : they felt they weren't as specifically goal-oriented as they were when using other sites, or other parts of the BBC website.

Users rated the sections of the lifestyle section they used very highly. They felt they provided an enormous variety of helpful and practical content, all written from a very accessible angle. They also felt that there was a high level of expertise available, underpinning the information and advice given. Users reported that these sites gave them a sense of really going deeper into a subject, and that the relevant BBC Online site provided an amazing, comprehensive resource – particularly when thinking about the archive material available.

Not surprisingly, given their feelings about the term 'lifestyle', no-one had used the 'lifestyle navigator'; the term had put them off, and although they were more in browsing mood, they wanted to browse within a very specific interest area.

"I can't believe there is so much there...I would never have looked at a lifestyle section, it doesn't mean anything to me"
(Pre-family, 18-25, BC1, Lighter Internet Usage, Non-User BBC Online, Cardiff)

6.3.11. Specific Feedback on Petals : Health

This sub-site was rarely used within the sample. It was interesting that respondents were so surprised that the BBC had a health section in its website. The immediate reaction to seeing the site was ...

"Why would the BBC have a health section? Well .. I suppose when you think about it, they do quite a lot of health programmes"
(Parents, 35-50, BC1, Heavier Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Hollywood)

However, once respondents had been shown the site, they accepted its relevance, and could see the benefits that the BBC might bring to this area. They felt that the BBC could cover health issues across a very comprehensive range :

“Think of all the programmes they’ve done on health issues”
(Parents, 35-50, C2DE, Lighter Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Newcastle)

They also felt that the BBC’s ‘trustworthiness’ in relation to the probable accuracy of information would be particularly valuable here.

“Yeah, I’d trust the information they gave you”
(Empty Nesters/ Singles, 60+ , BC1, Lighter Internet Usage, Non-User
BBC Online, Hollywood)

Some non-users were suspicious that the health site might just report the government’s view on a subject such as MMR, however after viewing the site, most felt that it was impartial, and actually gave balanced coverage of a variety of conflicting opinions. One of the greatest perceived values of the health sub-site was that it seemed to harness the expertise that the BBC had built up and had in-house to their presentation and communication skills, making difficult issues and subjects very user friendly.

“It’s written for us, not for experts”
(Parents, 20-35, BC1, Heavier Internet Usage, Non-User BBC Online, Leeds)

However, the health home page helped to highlight one of the main navigational issues for users. That is, their browser cut off the health page just below the main graphic content – meaning that most of the information they saw on the front page was programme-related or specific. Thus, the real ‘resource’ of the site remained unseen, as users weren’t scrolling down. Again respondents felt that this was a waste of their money: the site holds a comprehensive, accessible, trustworthy, user-friendly database of relevant issues: they felt they should know more about that.

6.4. What is BBC Online, and What Could it Be?

6.4.1 What is BBC Online?

Users perceived BBC Online to be a series of high quality, interesting, well designed sites. However, because they were rarely browsing, and when they were, they were thinking about a very specific interest, there was no feeling that the site pulled them in and prompted them to explore either the web, or indeed their website, in more depth. The value of the site that is distinctively ‘BBC’ was perceived to be the application of a set of principles (the ‘values’ described in 6.3.1) across a range of discrete sites.

6.4.2. What do Respondents Think BBC Online Could Be?

The ‘first stage’ to improving their usage and attitudes towards BBC Online would be to change the navigation and Home Page. Detailed recommendations are given for this in Section 5.6 of this report. However, in general terms, respondents actually expressed the desire that the BBC puts some effort into forming a coherent ‘role’, promise and tone for the site as a whole, and then actively promote it. The value to them would be as a trusted source to information about virtually everything, as well as the opportunity to

edit the content produced by the BBC into their schedule, addressing the issues, and giving the content, interactivity and entertainment they want.

Across the broad range of demographic types represented within the sample, everyone felt that because the BBC had to compete in a commercial environment, it was legitimate for it to be doing everything their competitors were. They felt that the BBC would work hard to make the content accessible to them, and that the BBC could gather or group related topics or links together to make surfing easier for them. This was particularly the case when thinking about specific topics and reflects the way they use the internet. Thus, they would be happy for BBC Online to provide links to unofficial websites of their favourite football team within their section of the site dealing with that team : that adds value by making their surfing easier. Similarly, they felt that the BBC's website should be free to be as serious or as irreverent as the context dictated: i.e. it would be inappropriate to impose a serious, BBC News type tone on an Eastenders or Chewin' the Fat quiz ('Which Eastender are you?', 'Are you a slapper?').

Thus, they felt that it was difficult to say that BBC Online should or should not be covering certain subjects in certain ways. The exception to this rule was where the BBC was felt to be contradicting the traditional values, for instance of independence. There was some concern that the BBC's coverage of the Hutton Enquiry – whether on air or on-line – was slightly biased in favour of the BBC. Other than this circumstance, respondents felt that it was the duty of the BBC to put its resources behind providing them with high quality, contemporary content across the range of what its competitors were doing, and to promote that they were doing that so that they could access it if they wanted.

6.5. Funding Issues

Most of the respondents had never thought about how the BBC's website was funded, and thus all of the discussion about the funding was in the context of being made to think about it.

It was almost impossible for respondents to discuss the licence fee in the context of BBC Online without talking about the value for money that the BBC generally provides. This made it difficult to unpick general views of the BBC and its television programmes in particular, from feelings about BBC Online and its funding.

Much negativity about the licence fee was expressed. Respondents wanted to talk about whether they should be paying a licence fee when they were paying a subscription to other providers. Others wanted to talk about the priorities in spending the licence fee, and the number of repeats on television. Interestingly, those who were most negative about the licence fee were reluctant to talk about the proportion of the fee spent on BBC Online as an individual; they constantly amalgamated the number of fees, and tried to calculate how much of a budget BBC Online had in total. This led them to criticise the licence fee's value for money in the context of how much was being spent on a resource which non-internet users could not access. Interestingly, when asked about this same issue in the context of Radio 3 and

4, respondents usually accepted that there was an argument that not all of the BBC would be accessed by everyone.

Clearly those not using BBC Online felt that it hadn't been value for money for them, however it was not an issue that they raised spontaneously within the groups. The licence fee seemed to provoke other, more immediate concerns, specifically subscription television and their weight of viewing BBC channels. However, they guessed that they would get value for money from it in the future, since once they were shown the site, they all expressed the intention to start using it.

Those who were using BBC Online judged it to be reasonable value for money for what they were currently getting, particularly after they had been shown the extent of the site. This led to them making connections between the discrete sites, and building a better picture of what BBC Online as a whole had to offer. Those who were streaming radio, reading up on the plots of missed episodes, and downloading follow up materials such as recipes tended to feel it was very good value for money. Indeed, and most users felt that BBC Online contributed significantly to the value they got generally from the licence fee. This was particularly the case because they were only using what they found useful, therefore the 'quality' was perceived only through what they found relevant. Further, they had constant "24/7" access to the resource, and indeed BBC Online gave them access to not only the output of the organisation, but also the research, expertise and data used in the making of that output.

There was some sensitivity about non-UK residents having access to BBC Online when prompted to think about it, however many respondents argued that it was valuable to them to have access to BBC Online – particularly the news service or a favourite radio station – when abroad on holiday or on business. Others derived a sense of national pride regarding the BBC web site's role in informing the world.

During the discussion, the moderators prompted respondents with two alternatives : funding BBC Online via advertising, and funding it via subscription. The advertising proposition was always controversial and prompted a great deal of discussion and disagreement within the groups. For everyone the BBC meant 'no advertising', and therefore independence and impartiality. It also meant, in the context of a website, no pop ups, which were an enormous source of annoyance to all internet users. There was some degree of acceptance that it was impossible to separate commerce and the BBC completely. They had read about product placement, and the BBC selling its series abroad. Indeed, some felt that it was so unfair that non web-users were paying for BBC Online that they were willing to accept a limited degree of advertising on the site to allow a discount on the licence fee for non-users. However, the majority argued loudly and strongly that the whole of the BBC would be undermined if one element of its service accepted advertising.

Subscription initially sounded a fairer option to respondents. They felt that it was fair that only users should pay for the service. Some talked about adding £3 to the licence fee as a kind of 'subscription': they then realised it would increase their costs, and changed their minds. No-one within the groups

expected that they would subscribe, and only a few within the groups currently subscribed to a website – almost always a work-related or very specific topic related website.

The general consensus was, therefore, that it would be nice to have a means of funding which didn't involve non-users paying for the site, but that the current arrangement was the only practicable solution that maintained the BBC's impartiality and independence.

It should also be mentioned that most respondents were unaware of how much their licence fee was, and none were aware of how much of that fee was spend on BBC Online. When told, 3% of £116 sounded much better value for money than they had thought.

APPENDIX ONE

A : Detailed Research Objectives

The overall aim of the research was to assess internet users' perceptions of, and attitudes towards the BBC's website. The specific research objectives were as follows:

- μ What role does BBC Online have for internet users, and what role do they feel it should have;
 - : how did they discover it
 - : how did they use it initially
 - : how do they use it now
 - : do they use it different places/ on different platforms, and what difference does that make
 - : what value does it have for them
 - : have they recommended BBC Online to others
 - : how generally would they characterise BBC Online
 - : how would they describe it to someone who'd never used it
 - : how do they link in, and out of the site
 - : how/ when/ for what kinds of things do they use the search function
 - : how does that usage change across the range of lifestages of internet users
 - : across the genres – what other sites do they use, and how do they compare with that element of BBC Online

 - : is there anything BBC Online is doing which they feel inappropriate/ where would they see the boundaries for BBC Online
 - : may be worth prompting with some plans for the future
 - educating licence fee payers on producing their own content
 - other self-generated content
 - any other issues DCMS wish to feed in

- μ Does it fulfil its public service broadcasting role
 - : if yes, in what way
 - : if no, why not
 - : what should that role be in the future
 - : what is the distinctive 'BBC' factor, if there is one, in BBC Online
 - : what is 'quality' in the context of users judging BBC Online

- μ Does it reflect BBC values :
 - quality
 - innovation
 - creativity
 - trustworthiness, fairness, impartiality

- μ How well has BBC Online performed against its original remit, as given in the background
 - : how do they use it
 - : what are their perceptions of it
 - : what are their attitudes towards it
 - : how well do they feel it has performed against its original consent conditions

- μ What role has BBC Online had, qualitatively defined, in pushing people towards, or helping them discover more about, the internet;
 - how do they feel about BBC Online promoting itself
 - how do they feel about BBC Online being promoted via other BBC services

- μ How do they feel about the following elements of BBC Online
 - : is it distinctive, and in what way
 - : is it a 'safe' environment, and how important is that to them
 - : what is 'trust' in this context
 - : do they feel it has uniquely British content, and what difference does that make for them
 - : is there a distinctiveness about the search function
 - trust & searching safety
 - Britishness
 - recommendations
 - no advertising

- μ How does it compare with other resources available
 - : what does it provide that others don't and how important is that to them in terms of valuing BBC Online
 - : what does it duplicate and how do they feel about that
 - : if there wasn't BBC Online how would they feel
 - : and what difference would it make to their internet usage
 - : what are the other sites that they use which they'd compare with parts of, or the, BBC On-line offer
 - : across the different genres (and groups of genres)
 - : and in relation to other search engines

- μ Does BBC Online represent good value for money :
 - : how do they define that in the context of PSB values on-line
 - : how do internet users feel about the BBC generally, and how does that relate (if it does) to how they feel about BBC Online

B : Detailed Sample Description

Medium-Heavy Users of BBC Online

Pre-family - single, cohabiting, or married, but with no children of their own.

Group 1 : Pre-family, 18-25, BC1, heavier weight of Internet usage, Newcastle

Group 2 : Pre-family, 18-25, C2D(E), lighter weight of Internet usage, Hollywood

Group 3 : Pre-family, 26-40, BC1, lighter weight of Internet usage, Watford

Group 4 : Pre-family, 26-40, C2D(E), heavier weight of internet usage, Glasgow

Parents with dependent children living at home

Group 5 : Parents whose eldest child is under 11, aged 20-35 themselves, BC1, lighter weight of internet usage, Birmingham

Group 6 : Parents whose eldest child is under 11, aged 20-35 themselves, C2D(E), heavier weight of Internet usage, Port Talbot

Group 7 : Parents whose eldest child is 11+, aged 35-50 themselves, BC1, heavier weight of internet usage, Hollywood

Parents, 35-50, C2DE, Lighter Internet Usage, BBC Online user, Newcastle : Parents whose eldest child is 11+, aged 35-50 themselves, C2D(E), lighter weight of internet usage, Newcastle

Empty nesters and older single people

Group 9 : Empty nester and older single people 50-60, BC1, lighter weight of internet usage, Edinburgh

Group 10 : Empty nester and older single people, 50-60, C2D(E), heavier weight of internet usage, Watford

Group 11 : Empty nesters and older single people, 60+, BC1, heavier weight of internet usage, Port Talbot

Group 12 : Empty nesters and older single people, 60+, C2D(E), lighter weight of internet usage, Birmingham

Very Light – Non-Users of BBC Online

Pre-family – single, cohabiting or married, with no dependent children

Group 13 : Pre-family, 18-25, BC1, lighter weight of Internet usage, Cardiff

Group 14 : Pre-family, 18-25, C2D(E), heavier weight of Internet usage, Hollywood

Group 15 : Pre-family, 26-40, BC1, heavier weight of Internet usage, Glasgow

Group 16 : Pre-family, 26-40, C2D(E), lighter weight of internet usage, Sutton Coldfield

Parents with dependent children living at home

Group 17 : Parents whose eldest child is under 11, aged 20-35 themselves, BC1, heavier weight of internet usage, Leeds

Group 18 : Parents whose eldest child is under 11, aged 20-35 themselves, C2D(E), lighter weight of Internet usage, Edinburgh

Group 19 : Parents whose eldest child is 11+, aged 35-50 themselves, BC1, lighter weight of internet usage, Wimbledon

Group 20 : Parents whose eldest child is 11+, aged 35-50 themselves, C2D(E), heavier weight of internet usage, Cardiff

Empty nester and older single people

Group 21 : Empty nester and older single people 50-60, BC1, heavier weight of internet usage, Sutton Coldfield

Group 22 : Empty nester and older single people, 50-60, C2D(E), lighter weight of internet usage, Wimbledon

Group 23 : Empty nesters and older single people, 60+, BC1, lighter weight of internet usage, Holywood

Group 24 : Empty nesters and older single people, 60+, C2D(E), heavier weight of internet usage, Leeds

(N.B. Group 24 was actually conducted via 3 x paired depth interviews, since these internet users were very hard to find)

Since young people were also important in terms of the remit of BBC Online, a series of interviews with them, structured as follows, was held.

Paired Depth 1 : male, BC1, Year 8, Watford

Paired Depth 2 : female, C2DE, Year 8, Wimbledon

Paired Depth 3 : male, C2DE, Year 9, Edinburgh

Paired Depth 4 : female, BC1, Year 9, Glasgow

Paired Depth 5 : male, BC1, Year 10, Sutton Coldfield

Paired Depth 6 : female, C2DE, Year 10, Birmingham

Paired Depth 7 : male, C2DE, Year 11, Cardiff

Paired Depth 8 : female, BC1, Year 11, Port Talbot

Mini-group 1 : male, BC1, Year 12, Newcastle

Mini-group 2 : female, C2DE, Year 12, Leeds

Mini-group 3 : male, C2DE, A level/ FE college, Holywood

Mini-group 4 : female, BC1, A level/ FE college, Holywood

The sample included some representation of people from ethnic minority communities; the adult groups were mixed sex; the groups were held in the recruiter's home; and most of the paired depth interviews were held in the respondent's home in order to explore BBC Online via their computers.

C : CPR1012 Revised (11/3/04) Discussion Guide – BBC Online Users

1. Introduction & Warm up

Respondents to introduce themselves and to tell the rest of the group and the moderator a bit about themselves

- do they live with any family/ friends
- what are their hobbies

2. Internet Usage

Moderator to probe the following

- how long have they been using the Internet
- how did they first get into the internet
- before they went on-line, what did they think they wanted to do on-line
- when they first started browsing on-line, what kinds of things did they do
- what was difficult, and what helped them overcome those difficulties (e.g. a website guide, book, portal)

- what are the main sites they use nowadays brainstormed, sites written on cards, key relevant sites probed and grouped to form a self-generated 'genre' map (moderator writes sites on cards, and then card sort done with sites generated)

- do they use search engines – which, how and why
- do they use chat rooms/ bulletin boards – which, how and why
- do they use interactivity (i.e. any service which asks them for input – on-line questionnaires, chat rooms, bulletin boards) – and how

- within each genre who would they say is the 'best in class' and why (keep as criteria to judge BBC Online's offer in each genre they identify)

- are there any sites which stand out as being different for any reason : which, and why

3. Attitudes to BBC Online

Respondents all given a cartoon of someone on a PC looking at the home page of the site. Moderator to explain that they should imagine that they've just come into the room to work on their computer, and as they sit down they see that the BBC Website is on their computer. What would go through their mind – they should write that in the thought bubble. Respondents to hand their responses in anonymously to the moderator (which respondent said what will be probed by the moderator later). Moderator to look through cartoons whilst conducting the brainstorm below, and feed in comments from the cartoons as appropriate.

Moderator to pick up the card with BBC Online / BBC Website/ BBC On-line (which we'll call whatever term the respondents use from here on) on it, and to conduct a brainstorm with the group : "When I say BBC Online/ BBC On-line/ BBC Website to you, what goes through your mind". List of attributes, likes/ dislikes, spontaneous suggestions etc generated, all issues written on cards, and probed amongst the rest of the group.

Once this picture has been established, moderator to talk the respondents through a more structured set of issues, as follows:

Discovering BBC Online

- can they remember how they first found out about BBC on-line (BBC Online)
- what were their expectations of it and why
- how did they first start using/ exploring the site
- what did they like/ dislike about it when they first started using it
- what was difficult or confusing
- what did it give them which they weren't getting anywhere else
- was it one of the first internet sites they used

Current Usage of BBC Online

- how are they currently using BBC Online
 - : how often do they visit it
 - : have they got it bookmarked, and which page of it is bookmarked
 - : what would a typical session that involved them visiting BBC Online be like (start, then what, then what – build up an idea of whether they use it as a portal or a site)
- what parts of it are they visiting regularly and why
- what parts do they occasionally visit, and why
- what parts of the site do they know about but don't use themselves, and why
- how do they find new parts of the site

- do they recommend pages/ sections to friends and vice versa or not (and why)
- how would they describe BBC Online to people who've never seen it
 - : what would you have to get over to them so that they understood what it was trying to do
 - : how would they describe what it was like to use
 - : if their friend asked, well what would I get out of it, what would they say

- how do they currently access BBC Online – always on a PC or also on PDA/ combined PDA/ phone etc, WAP services etc. and what difference does that make
- where do they tend to access BBC Online, and is it on their own/ with others (who)
- how do they usually get to the site (if not already covered)
 - : linking from other sites (which and how)
 - : typing in the URL
 - : bookmarked/ favourites
 - : other
- when do they find themselves going to BBC Online generally (although obviously we will probe this individually under genres)

- do they link to other sites through BBC Online?
 - : If so which ones?
 - : Do they use links, search engines or URLs to move onward out of BBC content?

Image/ reputation/ character of BBC Online

Who do they think BBC Online is aimed at? – is it a website that provides something for everyone?

Moderator to write 'BBC' on a card, and 'BBC Online' on another, and ask respondents how the two relate to one another

- do they have a 'fit' and what is that
- how does the BBC's television and radio role compare with their on-line role
- what's different about what they should be providing on-line
- how do they feel about the BBC having a role on-line at all

What marks would they give BBC Online out of 10 for how well they're doing, and why

4. BBC Online as having Public Service Broadcasting Values

If the BBC is what's called our "public service" broadcaster, what do they think that means for their website/ on-line offer/ service. The PBS role is defined as to "inform, entertain and educate".

- does that apply to the website, and in what way
- how well does it fulfil its duty to "inform, entertain and educate"

Are they aware of how its funded? – if not prompt

- as licence fee payers, how would they want their money to be spent
- Is BBC Online good value for money and why ?
 - : how do they judge that
 - : if we said that 3% of the licence fee was spent on the website, how do they feel about that (licence fee is currently £116 if they're unsure)
- to what extent is it poor value for money and why
- what would make it good value for money

- the BBC argues that it provides value for money by providing the following :
to what extent do they feel this is the case, and why

- : quality
- : innovation
- : creativity
- : trustworthiness

Do they see it as (and is it valuable for it to be) :

- a safe environment
- impartial
- distinctive
- unique - does any other website provide what BBC Online provides?
- A guide/home to the wider online environment?
- Essential?
- A way to making the BBC more accountability to us licence fee payers?

The BBC is trying to continue to develop its public service role in relation to digital services: for instance they are educating users to produce their own content (e.g. set up their own websites, tell their life history on-line with pictures as well as stories); they might contribute an 'on-line diary of a week in the life of someone

- how do they feel about that

5. Different Elements within the Site

Moderator to conduct a group surf (via laptop & projector) through the site, covering the following areas :

- home page
- news
- sports
- radio
- music
- children's (if appropriate)
- lifestyle (food, interiors/ property/ gardening/ personal interests)
- business
- entertainment
- health
- learning
- science & nature
- society & culture
- history

(moderators to pick two of the underlined areas, and then at least one other area from what they've said they're interested in)

For each genre of interest

- what do they think of BBC Online in relation to this subject/ these pages
- what are the strengths and weaknesses of the section
- what other sites do they get this kind of information from
 - : if the BBC Online pages/ section wasn't available, would their use of these sites change, and how
- how does BBC Online compare with them
- is there anything distinctive about BBC Online's offer in this subject
- is there a distinctive 'BBC element' in this subject area

- is there anything they feel the BBC Online offers here that it shouldn't, or that others do better

IF NOT ALREADY COVERED, MAKE SURE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING PROBED:

1. Search Function

- do they use the search function in BBC Online

: when

: how

: what do they think of it

: what do they like/ dislike

: how does the search function compare with other searches

(try to understand whether they expect the search engine to be BBC site only; or "restricted" in some way – relates to how they use the site, i.e. as a portal/ guide, or as a stand-alone site)

: listen for spontaneous mention of 'safe' environment, Britishness, and recommended linked sites and probe where occur

: if not mentioned, moderator to raise BBC Online's claims about the following and probe

... that the search function provides a safe environment for anyone to search

- how do they feel about that

- what does 'safe' mean in this context

... that the search is UK only, and provides a truly British context for searching

- how do they feel about that

- what difference does it make to them as browsers

... that the site provides 'recommended' links

- how do they feel about that

- what difference does it make to them as users of BBC Online/ the internet

2. **No Advertising**

... that BBC Online has no advertising

- how do they feel about that

- how would they feel about BBC Online being funded by advertising

- how would they feel about BBC Online being funded by subscription so that there was no advertising

- what difference does that make to them as browsers

- in this context, how do they feel about BBC Online promoting its services on-air, or on other parts of the website, on the radio etc. (put double sided argument viz BBC has a responsibility to make sure its audience know about its services, vs unfair competition via monopoly on promotion)

3. **Where I live**

"Where I live" – probed in particular **FOR ALL**

- do they use this

- why/ why not
 - what do they like about it/ what don't they like about it
 - what would make that section more valuable
 - in Wales – what role for language
 - what other sites do you they use for local info
- for all – what difference would it make to BBC Online if the 'where I live' section wasn't there**

Finally, to finish, moderator to probe – having looked at the range of what BBC Online covers, what other sites do they feel have that comprehensiveness.

Thank and close

D : CPR1012 Final Discussion Guide – BBC Online Light/ Non-users

1. Introduction & Warm up

Respondents to introduce themselves and to tell the rest of the group and the moderator a bit about themselves

- do they live with any family/ friends
- what are their hobbies

2. Internet Usage

Moderator to probe the following

- how long have they been using the Internet
- how did they first get into the internet
- before they went on-line, what did they think they wanted to do on-line
- when they first started browsing on-line, what kinds of things did they do
- what was difficult, and what helped them overcome those difficulties (e.g. a website guide, book, portal)

- what are the main sites they use nowadays brainstormed, sites written on cards, key relevant sites probed and groups to form a self-generated 'genre' map (moderator writes sites on cards, and then card sort done with sites generated)

- do they use search engines – which and how and why?
- do they use chat rooms/ bulletin boards – which and how and why?
- do they use interactivity (i.e. any service which asks them for input – on-line questionnaires, chat rooms, bulletin boards) – how
- do they use any websites as a portal (i.e. the site is like a mini-guide to what's available on the net, and takes you via links to a variety of other sites – a 'gateway')

- within each genre, who would they say is the 'best in class' and why

- are there any sites which stand out as being different for any reason : which, and why

3. Attitudes to BBC Online

Respondents all given a cartoon of someone on a PC looking at the home page of the site. Moderator to explain that they should imagine that they've just come into the room to work on their computer, and as they sit down they see that the BBC Website is on their computer. What would go through their mind – they should write that in the thought bubble. Respondents to hand their responses in anonymously to the moderator (which respondent said what will be probed by the moderator later.

Moderator to pick up the card with BBC Online on it, and to conduct a brainstorm with the group : "When I say BBC Online to you, what goes through your mind". List of impressions, thoughts, opinions, attributes,

spontaneous suggestions etc. generated, all issues written on cards, and probed amongst the rest of the group.

For the light users - likes/ dislikes, areas used probed.

Moderator to use the thought bubbles throughout this discussion to probe feelings/ thoughts/ attitudes.

- what kind of impression/ idea of BBC Online do they have
- how did they build up/ get that impression
- what's it like, what's it not like

- it's been mentioned on TV, and on radio – have they heard these mentions and what went through their mind when they heard them
- where else have they heard references to BBC Online/ BBO On-line/ BBC's website
- what stopped them from checking these out
- what did they expect them to be like

What stops them from using BBC Online (more)

- spontaneous thoughts listed, and probed fully amongst the group

- what doesn't it offer that they'd want
- what does it offer that it shouldn't/ that puts them
- what would BBC Online have to have/ be like for them to start using it
- what do they think other people get out of it : and why don't they get that out of it

- if the issue is that they just haven't heard of it (probe to make sure, e.g. the www. mentions at the end of programmes) – how would they want to hear about it/ learn about it

- what should the site contain / cover

Image/ reputation/ character of BBC Online

Who do they think BBC Online is aimed at? – should it be a website that provides something for everyone?

Moderator to write 'BBC' on a card, and 'BBC Online' on another, and ask respondents how they see the two in relation to one another

- do they/ should they have a 'fit' and what is that
- how does the BBC's television and radio role compare with their what their on-line role is, or should be
- what's different about what they should be providing on-line
- how do they feel about the BBC having a role on-line at all

4. BBC Online as having Public Service Broadcasting Values

If the BBC is what's called our "public service" broadcaster, what do they think that means for their website/ on-line offer/ service. The PBS role is defined as to "inform, entertain and educate".

- does that apply to the website, and in what way
- how well does it fulfil its duty to "inform, entertain and educate"
- what should it be doing to fulfil that role

Are they aware of how its funded? – if not prompt

- as licence fee payers, how would they want their money to be spent
- and how do they feel about the BBC spending that money on BBC Online
- what should be their priorities within that
- the BBC spend 3% of the licence fee on BBC Online – how do they feel about that
- what would BBC need to do for it to start being good value for money for them

What role is there for each of the following arguments from the BBC that their site is unique in that it is ...

- a safe environment
- impartial
- distinctive
- unique – to what extent do they think (light users) that other websites provide what BBC Online provides?

The BBC is trying to continue to develop its public service role in relation to digital services: for instance they are educating users to produce their own content (e.g. set up their own websites, tell their life history on-line with pictures as well as stories); they might contribute an 'on-line diary of a week in the life of someone

- how do they feel about that

5. Different Elements within the Site

Moderator to conduct a group surf (via laptop & projector) through the site, covering the following areas (dependent on their interest) :

- home page
- news
- sports
- music
- children's (if appropriate)
- lifestyle (food, interiors/ property/ gardening/ personal interests)
- business
- entertainment
- health
- learning
- science & nature

- society & culture
- history

(moderators to pick two of the underlined areas, and then at least one other area from what they've said they're interested in)

For each genre of interest

- what do they think of BBC Online in relation to this subject/ these pages
- what are their first impressions of this subject
- would they use this section, now they've seen it
- what other sites do they get this kind of information from
(refer back to genre map from opening brainstorm on sites/ portals currently used : how does the BBC Online shown compare with those identified earlier?)
- how does BBC Online compare with them
- is there anything distinctive about BBC Online's offer in this subject
- is there a distinctive 'BBC element' in this subject area
- is there anything they feel the BBC Online offers here that it shouldn't, or that others do better

IF NOT ALREADY COVERED, MAKE SURE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING PROBED:

1. Search Function

- do they use the search function in BBC Online
 - : when
 - : how
 - : what do they think of it
 - : what do they like/ dislike
 - : how does the search function compare with other searches
(try to understand whether they expect the search engine to be BBC site only; or "restricted" in some way – relates to how they use the site, i.e. as a portal/ guide, or as a stand-alone site)
 - : listen for spontaneous mention of 'safe' environment, Britishness, and recommended linked sites and probe where occur
 - : if not mentioned, moderator to raise BBC Online's claims about the following and probe
- ... that the search function provides a safe environment for anyone to search
 - how do they feel about that
 - what does 'safe' mean in this context
- ... that the search is UK only, and provides a truly British context for searching
 - how do they feel about that
 - what difference does it make to them as browsers
- ... that the site provides 'recommended' links
 - how do they feel about that

- what difference does it make to them as users of BBC Online/ the internet

2. No Advertising

... that BBC Online has no advertising

- how do they feel about that
- how would they feel about BBC Online being funded by advertising
- how would they feel about BBC Online being funded by subscription so that there was no advertising
 - what difference does that make to them as browsers
- in this context, how do they feel about BBC Online promoting its services on-air, or on other parts of the website, on the radio etc. (put double sided argument viz BBC has a responsibility to make sure its audience know about its services, vs unfair competition via monopoly on promotion)

3. Where I live

"Where I live" – probed in particular **FOR ALL**

- do they use this
 - why/ why not
 - what do they like about it/ what don't they like about it
 - what would make that section more valuable
 - in Wales – what role for language
 - what other sites do you they use for local info
- for all – what difference would it make to BBC Online if the 'where I live' section wasn't there**

Finally, to finish, moderator to probe – having looked at the range of what BBC Online covers, what other sites do they feel have that comprehensiveness.

Thank and close

E : CPR1012 Final (11th March) Discussion Guide – BBC Online Users

1. Introduction & Warm up

Respondents to introduce themselves and to tell the moderator a bit about themselves

- do they live with any family/ friends
- what are their hobbies

2. Internet Usage

Moderator to probe the following

- how long have they been using the Internet
- how did they first get into the internet
- before they went on-line, what did they think they wanted to do on-line
- when they first started browsing on-line, what kinds of things did they do
- what was difficult, and what helped them overcome those difficulties

- what are the main sites they use nowadays brainstormed, sites written on cards, key relevant sites probed and grouped to form a self-generated 'genre' map (moderator writes sites on cards, and then card sort done with sites generated)

- do they use search engines – which, how and why
- do they use chat rooms/ bulletin boards – which, how and why
- do they use interactivity (i.e. any service which asks them for input – on-line questionnaires, chat rooms, bulletin boards) – and how

- within each genre who would they say is the 'best in class' and why (keep as criteria to judge BBC Online's offer in each genre they identify)

- are there any sites which stand out as being different for any reason : which, and why

3. Attitudes to BBC Online

Respondents all given a cartoon of someone on a PC looking at the home page of the site. Moderator to explain that they should imagine that they've just come into the room to work on their computer, and as they sit down they see that the BBC Website is on their computer. What would go through their mind – they should write that in the thought bubble. Respondents to hand their responses in anonymously to the moderator (which respondent said what will be probed by the moderator later). Moderator to look through cartoons whilst conducting the brainstorm below, and feed in comments from the cartoons as appropriate.

Moderator to pick up the card with BBC Online / BBC Website/ BBC On-line (which we'll call whatever term the respondents use from here on) on it, and to conduct a brainstorm with the group : "When I say BBC Online/ BBC On-line/ BBC Website to you, what goes through your mind". List of attributes, likes/ dislikes, spontaneous suggestions etc generated, all issues written on cards, and probed amongst the rest of the group.

Once this picture has been established, moderator to talk the respondents through a more structured set of issues, as follows:

Discovering BBC Online

- can they remember how they first found out about BBC on-line (BBC Online)
- what were their expectations of it and why
- how did they first start using/ exploring the site
- what did they like/ dislike about it when they first started using it
- what was difficult or confusing
- what did it give them which they weren't getting anywhere else
- was it one of the first internet sites they used

Current Usage of BBC Online

- how are they currently using BBC Online
 - : how often do they visit it
 - : have they got it bookmarked, and which page of it is bookmarked
 - : what would a typical session that involved them visiting BBC Online be like (start, then what, then what – build up an idea of whether they use it as a portal or a site)
- what parts of it are they visiting regularly and why
- what parts do they occasionally visit, and why
- what parts of the site do they know about but don't use themselves, and why
- how do they find new parts of the site

- do they recommend pages/ sections to friends and vice versa or not (and why)
- how would they describe BBC Online to people who've never seen it
 - : what would you have to get over to them so that they understood what it was good at/ best at
 - : how would they describe what it was like to use
 - : if their friend asked, well what would I get out of it that I couldn't get anywhere else, what would they say

- how do they currently access BBC Online – always on a PC or also on PDA/ combined PDA/ phone etc, WAP services etc. and what difference does that make
- where do they tend to access BBC Online, and is it on their own/ with others (who)
- how do they usually get to the site (if not already covered)
 - : linking from other sites (which and how)
 - : typing in the URL
 - : bookmarked/ favourites
 - : other
- when do they find themselves going to BBC Online generally (although obviously we will probe this individually under genres)

- do they link to other sites through BBC Online?
 - : If so which ones?
 - : Do they use links, search engines or URLs to move onward out of BBC content?

Image/ reputation/ character of BBC Online

Who do they think BBC Online is aimed at? – is it a website that provides something for everyone?

What do they think other young people think about BBC Online

What do they think it offers young people in particular

Do they ever talk about things they've found on the site with friends - what

Moderator to write 'BBC' on a card, and 'BBC Online' on another, and ask respondents how the two relate to one another

- do they have a 'fit' and what is that
- how does the BBC's television and radio role compare with their on-line role
- what's different about what they should be providing on-line
- how do they feel about the BBC having a role on-line at all

What marks would they give BBC Online out of 10 for how well they're doing, and why

4. BBC Online as having Public Service Broadcasting Values

If the BBC is what's called our "public service" broadcaster, what do they think that means for their website/ on-line offer/ service. The PBS role is defined as to "inform, entertain and educate".

- does that apply to the website, and in what way
- how well does it fulfil its duty to "inform, entertain and educate"
- the BBC argues that it provides value for money by providing the following :
to what extent do they feel this is the case, and why

- : quality
- : innovative/ being first to try new things/ bring new things out
- : creative
- : trustworthy/ a site where you can feel confident that they're telling you the truth, and won't expose you to stuff you don't want to see

5. Different Elements within the Site

Moderator to conduct a surf (via laptop) through the site, covering the following areas :

- home page
- news
- sports
- radio

- music
- children's / young people's content (if appropriate)
- lifestyle (food, interiors/ property/ gardening/ personal interests)
- business
- entertainment
- health
- learning
- science & nature
- society & culture
- history

(moderators to pick two of the underlined areas, and then at least one other area from what they've said they're interested in)

For each genre of interest

- what do they think of BBC Online in relation to this subject/ these pages
- what are the strengths and weaknesses of the section
- what other sites do they get this kind of information from
 - : if the BBC Online pages/ section wasn't available, would their use of these sites change, and how
- how does BBC Online compare with them
- is there anything distinctive about BBC Online's offer in this subject
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