The Relationship Between the BBC and the Commercial Radio Sector in promoting DAB (Digital Audio Broadcasting) in the United Kingdom.

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ABSTRACT

The place of Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) in the UK provides an interesting area of study. As of 2015, it is a platform which has been in existence for twenty years. During that time its position has been nebulous. It represents only one method of listening to radio output in a digital format but one in which the BBC, and latterly, the commercial radio sector, placed a huge degree of trust. It has however not become the standard mode of radio listening. One can argue that after much proactive effort from within the UK radio industry, its position may be beginning to falter somewhat in the commercial sector while remaining a paramount policy objective for the BBC.

The aim of this thesis is to account for the emergence of DAB and its impact on the relationship between the BBC and the commercial radio sector. It examines the separate and joint roles of each in promoting DAB and highlights how this led to a unique period of cooperation between the two. A historical backdrop is necessary in order to establish the previous state of relations, before embarking upon the core of the thesis which argues that both parties adopted significant changes of posture in order to promote DAB. I argue that the implementation of DAB as a new radio technology represents a marked period of institutional change within the UK radio industry. In playing distinct, separate roles, I show how this reveals a maturity within the industry whereby the BBC and the commercial sector reached a point of equality. In promoting a joint role, based on a policy of overt cooperation, I demonstrate how this represented a major shift in the historical relationship between both parties.

Relying on a small canon of secondary sources and an extensive survey of primary source documentation, as well as interviews with some of the key players in DAB and the UK radio industry as a whole, this thesis provides a study of a significant period in British radio history which witnessed the development of a nascent radio platform, coupled with a significant change in the dynamic of existing relationships within the industry. In doing so, it delivers a wider historical interpretation of a particular point in radio history and marks a critical phase when the very nature of the industry changed.

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, John Patrick Devlin, hereby declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

During the course of 2002 the BBC launched five new national radio stations.[1] This was the first time a new national BBC network had been established since BBC Radio Five went on air in August 1990[2] and before that the creation of Radios 1, 2, 3 and 4 back in 1967. Outlining her plans for the five new national radio services on the 28 September 2000, Jenny Abramsky (Managing Director, BBC Radio)[3] emphasised the fact that the services would:

> Aim to attract audience groups under-served by existing BBC Network Radio, such as young families and people from ethnic minority backgrounds. Not only would the commissioning of new, quality programming be paramount, the new stations would also draw on the BBC's speech and music archives and give wider exposure to events, such as sports, where the corporation already owned the rights.[4]

As well as simply extending the range of BBC Radio output by creating distinctive, public service radio stations, Ambramsky highlighted the need to take advantage of different emerging digital platforms and emphasised that:

> Each of the new services would be available via digital satellite, digital cable, the internet and digital radio sets.[5]

The unique feature of the new services was that they would be digital services and therefore not available through the ubiquitous, standard, analogue radio receiver which had dominated the radio listening market for the previous 75 years.

Changes to its radio portfolio had already occurred on a few occasions throughout the corporation's history. The BBC had fostered a strong relationship with its audience during the 1920s and 1930s (Briggs 1995, Vol 2, p235) but with the Second World War

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[1] Five Live Sports Extra launched on 2nd February, 6 Music on 11th March, 1Xtra on 16th August, Asian Network on 28th October and BBC 7 on 15th December.
[2] Subsequently relaunched as Radio Five Live in March 1994.
[3] Abramsky was appointed Director of Radio in 1999. Her job title was changed to Director of Audio & Music in 2006 and she retired from this position in 2008. The official title of the BBC's head of radio has changed over the years. So, for example, Liz Forgan (1993-1996) was Managing Director, Radio. The present incumbent, Helen Boaden, is referred to under the original name, Director of Radio.
[4] BBC Press Release, Sept 28, 2000.
[5] ibid.

looming the corporation became more alert to the varying needs of this audience and began to recognise the necessity of catering for differing listener tastes and aspirations. This saw the eventual creation of the Empire Service and the emergence of the Home Service from the National and Regional Programmes. By 1946 the then Director General, Sir William Haley, recognised a need to reflect a wider range of tastes and develop a more settled system of programmes which resulted in the post war triumvirate of the Home Service, the Light Programme and the Third Programme.

Commentators often describe the 1930s as the 'Golden Age of Wireless' (e.g. Briggs 1995, vol 2) but in many ways the post war years represented the zenith of radio broadcasting in the United Kingdom,[6] fulfilling a significant role as informer, educator and entertainer[7] during these austere years even as the new medium of television began to encroach on radio's erstwhile hegemonic status. Although BBC Radio faced little radio competition at this time, the steadily increasing demand for television and the arrival of ITV in 1955[8] meant BBC Radio was to suffer, as the medium in ascendancy was favoured in terms of resource allocation - particularly after the runaway success of television during coverage of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on 2 June 1953, when BBC Television coverage achieved a peak viewing audience of over 20 million, overtaking the radio audience of 12 million for the first time, marking it as a 'watershed in broadcasting history' (Holmes 2005, p47).

Since Haley's changes in 1946, the face of BBC radio remained unaltered for a further twenty one years. It was competition from offshore pirate stations which would send a shot over the prow on Portland Place.[9] The BBC could not ignore the popularity of the popular music service provided by the pirates to an avid young audience (Crisell 1997, p138) which the corporation had been neglecting and Radio 1 was deemed the perfect vehicle for this disaffected group to board.[10] As the pirates were banned under the Marine, &c., Broadcasting (Offences) Act 1967 and Radio 1 came to air, the Light

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[6] Many landmark programmes were created during this period such as *Under Milk Wood (1954)*, *The Radio Ballads (1958)*, *Hancock's Half Hour (1954)*, *The Goons (1951)* and *The Archers (1951)*.

[7] First Director General John Reith's description of the role of the BBC to inform, educate and entertain is still at the core of the organisation today.

[8] BBC Radio went head to head on ITV's opening night with the death of Grace Archer in The Archers.

[9] Architect George Val Myer used the idea of an ocean liner as the design for Broadcasting House. See Reid (1987).

[10] DJ Tony Blackburn launched BBC Radio 1 on 30 September 1967.

Programme, the Third Programme and the Home Service were respectfully renamed Radios 2, 3 and 4.

In 1973, BBC Radio had to emerge from its cocoon as LBC and Capital Radio in London became the first legalised commercial contenders in the marketplace. Such competition was to spread on a local level and eventually on a national level as Classic FM became the first national offspring of the 1990 Broadcasting Act.[11] As more and more stations entered the arena, offering alternative listening brands for an increasingly demanding and selective audience, the weaknesses of the BBC national networks became exposed through a plummet in listening figures. For example, Radio 2's share in London dropped from 22% in 1988 to 11% in 1991[12] and by 1993 Radio 1 had lost around 8 million listeners to commercial alternatives.[13] By the time of the launch of the new digital services in 2002 however, BBC national radio had undergone something of a renaissance and was again beginning to enjoy successful listening across all networks with Radio 4 pushing 10 million listeners and Radio 2 consistently reaching 12.5 million.[14] Radio as a medium had been holding its own against other media with RAJAR[15] figures suggesting that for the first time in at least three decades, radio listening had exceeded television viewing in the UK (Rudin and Ibbotson 2002, p12). Street (2002, p135) proposes that history will judge May 2002 as a 'significant milestone in radio history' as audience figures began to signal a recovery of the BBC's position and indeed demonstrate a strong performance for the commercial sector and hence the industry as a whole.

Back in September 1995 the BBC had embarked upon the road of digital broadcasting which the then Managing Director, Radio, Liz Forgan, described as an historic moment marking 'the third age of radio, namely from analogue AM to analogue FM to digital multimedia.'[16] The digital signal delivered near-CD quality sound without interference, as well as text, data and graphics alongside the digital signal. BBC Radio began to pioneer a national digital radio service in preparation for the arrival of domestic digital radio receivers. In 1995 however there were virtually no consumers for digital radio

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[11] Classic FM launched in September 1992 followed by Virgin 1215 in April 1993 and Talk Radio in February 1995.
[12] BBC Radio Daily Survey Reports, 1988-1991. London, BBC.
[13] BBC Radio Daily Survey Reports, 1988-1993. London, BBC & RAJAR 1992-1993.
[14] RAJAR 2003.
[15] RAJAR 2001.
[16] BBC Press Release, 27 September 1995. London, BBC.

beyond an elite group within the industry itself. One conservative estimate is that in the period up until the arrival of the commercial broadcaster Digital One[17] at the end of 1999, there may have been merely two hundred digital radio receivers in the UK, with the BBC probably owning seventy-five, the rest of the radio industry owning another seventy-five and fifty in the hands of the man in the street (Cornell, interview with author, 2003). Despite this severe shortcoming the BBC remained committed to not veering off the digital path for a number of reasons: the Broadcasting Act of 1996 officially enshrined a digital future for Britain on radio, television and other services but as well as that the BBC had been involved in the research and development work into digital radio from a very early stage through the European Union's Eureka 147 initiative (Maxon 2007, p16).

This study examines three aspects of radio history – the BBC, the commercial sector and the introduction of DAB. It is not however a series of linear histories covering well-trodden ground, but instead represents a historiography which attempts to examine each aspect in relation to the other and in doing so, develop an argument which suggests these three forces working in concert, shifted the established dynamic within the UK radio industry. A mere historical account of the development of digital radio does in itself make fascinating reading for any student of radio, but beyond the timeline approach there are also serious academic considerations to be evaluated in order to construct an account worthy of scrutiny on many different levels. A study of the gestation period from 1995 until the birth of the new digital services in 2002 requires an analysis of various factors associated with the continued persistence of a desire by the BBC to follow the digital radio route, whether for its own motivations or for reasons that would impact on the wider radio industry. It is also more crucial on an academic level to illustrate this most recent aspect of BBC Radio history within a comparative context, namely as the latest in a succession of relationships with the commercial radio[18] sector which have challenged the BBC's position within the UK radio industry. This requires a study of previous perceived threats and/or opportunities emanating from the commercial radio sector before moving on to concentrate on the most recent period as the centrepiece of the study, while at the same time accounting for the commercial sector's own role in the overall picture of DAB in the UK. The thesis should not be seen

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[17] The UK's national commercial digital radio multiplex.
[18] I use the term 'commercial radio' as an umbrella term to define BBC radio competitors, whether at home or abroad or whether legal or illegal.

as merely a contribution to the ongoing narrative of radio history, which tends to be skewed heavily towards the BBC, but instead categorized as a study of a landmark period in the history of radio in the UK - one defined by the introduction of a new technology and the shifting of relations between that industry's two leading players.

The Research Aim

I intend to account for the historical relationship between the BBC and the commercial sector and then focus on how the launch of DAB[19] impacted on that relationship. In doing so, the thesis addresses the broader historical basis of the relationship between the two entities before going on to examine the minutiae of that relationship in the DAB era, in order to highlight what I perceive to be a change in the balance of the relationship which, I argue, had its foundations in the preceeding decades but changed significantly in the period under scrutiny. I demonstrate the nature of this shift, the driving forces behind it and its subsequent impact.

I aim to illustrate how a previously distant rapport was transformed – for a period – into one of overt cooperation in order to promote a technology which both parties envisaged as necessary for the survival of the greater radio industry as a whole and how each party, while playing its own separate distinctive role, also promoted a policy of cooperation. I hope to highlight a key period in the history of the UK radio industry but also in the history of BBC radio and in the history of UK commercial radio, when the dynamic of existing relations altered. By questioning why such a change took place and illustrating its form, the study will provide an insight into a unique era in radio history, one which I suggest represents a significant deviation from the preceeding eras.

There are two broad research questions which the thesis seeks to address in order to fulfil the aim of highlighting a change of direction within the industry;

i) What has been the historical relationship between the BBC and the commercial sector?

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[19] There are a number of ways of distributing digital radio. This study concentrates on Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) which is the distribution of a digital signal to a compatible receiving set (see Chapter 6).

ii) What was the relationship between the BBC and the commercial sector in relation to the most recent technological development in radio i.e. the launch of DAB digital radio?

In order to answer the two core questions – and thus address the aim of the research - the thesis is structured accordingly by being divided into two separate sections, one examining the historical relationship and the remaining section concentrating on the digital era.

Section 1 – The Historical Context: The BBC and the Commercial Sector

Chapter 1 – The Emergence of an Industry: The BBC and its Competitors, 1922-1967
This chapter serves as a concise backdrop to the state of the relationships between the BBC and its various competitors in the decades preceding the arrival of legalised commercial radio broadcasting in the UK. From the 1930s pioneers through to the 1960s buccaneers, the aim is to examine the forms of competition and the BBC's reactions to each in order to illustrate a largely polarised broadcasting environment.

Chapter 2 – The BBC and Independent Radio: 1967-1988
The Sound Broadcasting Act 1972 finally gave legal status to proponents of a competitive UK industry and led to the creation of an independent radio sector. The use of the term *independent* is applied to the new stations which appeared at this time as it encapsulates the notion of independence from government control. The independent stations represented a new formalised tranche of competition for the BBC as it embarked on a project of creating a grid of local stations. A dissatisfaction among some listeners towards the independent stations as well as the BBC would lead to a re-emergence of pirate stations in the 1980s.

Chapter 3 – The BBC and Commercial Radio: 1988-1995
The Broadcasting Act 1990 led to two very significant changes for the private sector. Firstly, gone was the previous strong emphasis on over-regulation and stations were now attempting to placate shareholders instead of regulators, hence the use of the term *commercial* rather than *independent* and for the first time we witness the arrival of powerful new radio companies in the marketplace. Secondly, the BBC was to be challenged, not just at a local level but at a national level too.

Chapter 4 – Digital Radio in the UK

Defining DAB is necessary in order to discover its technical strengths, weaknesses and potentialities and to place it in the gamut of emergent digital radio media. From this one can proceed to examine the forces driving digital Britain and radio's perceived role therein.

Chapter 5 – The BBC and DAB

From research and development through to launch, the BBC has been involved in the DAB story right from the very beginning and it seems appropriate to ask what its motivations were initially and why it continued through to the promotional phase.

Chapter 6 – The Commercial Radio Sector and DAB

If the BBC was an initiator of DAB in the UK then it is important to understand the reaction of the commercial sector to the new technology and even more so, why it decided to embrace it and ask whether the commercial sector's role was always secondary to a BBC position as leader in the field.

Within Section 1 of the thesis I hope to illustrate the static and unyielding relationship between the BBC and its commercial rivals before exploring in Section 2 how, after decades of divergence, both the BBC and the commercial sector converged in order to salvage the radio industry as a whole through the promotion of DAB. The historical perspective outlined in Section 1 is necessary in order to provide the reader with an understanding of the degree of divergence which existed among the actors therein before the arrival of DAB - which I argue, reversed the long established division within the industry. There is no doubt there was an initial excitement within the BBC and then the commercial sector in the early days of DAB promotion and indeed both parties have worked hard to promote it with significant investment in promotion, programming content and transmitters. But this has not been an easy journey and further down the line cracks have appeared in the policy largely due to reluctance on the part of consumers.[20]

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[20] 1.94 million digital radio sets were sold in the UK in 2010, representing a fall for the second year in a row from 1.99million in 2009 and 2.08million in 2008. (*Daily Telegraph*, 24 Oct 2011).

DAB has faced a number of significant setbacks including the switching off of many UK commercial digital stations because of falling revenue[21] and the decision by Channel 4 to cancel its digital radio plans in October 2008,[22] as well as the failure to set a practical date for digital radio switchover.[23] Despite such setbacks however, the BBC and certain sections of the commercial sector still remain committed to DAB.

Section 1 is largely a historical account. It is not however a mere regurgitation of existing histories but rather represents a reappraisal of a very specific area and is bolstered by new research findings. Section 2 is clearly a thorough investigation into a particular era and to that end represents an investigation into an area which has received little attention from both within academia and the industry. The research reveals a changing dynamic within the existing relationships in the UK radio industry and to that end, provides a unique detail of the key period of DAB and in doing so, makes a firm contribution to academic study as well as accounting for the status of industry at the time. The thesis examines an area of study which has suffered from academic neglect, namely; the core relationships between the actors in the UK radio industry. Previous studies[24] tend to focus on a strictly historical narrative largely based on the institutional basis of the BBC. This study seeks to address a lacuna in radio history by highlighting the significant roles played by both the commercial sector and the BBC in promoting a policy of cooperation in order to promote a new technology which was heralded as necessary for the survival of the industry as a whole.

The main body of the thesis finishes in 2002/03 and I have chosen this cut off point for a number of reasons. This was the point where the BBC launched new digital only services, thus demonstrating a long term commitment to DAB and it is the point where the commercial sector had firmly established its DAB position. While some elements within the commercial sector can be seen to falter after this date, it represents what I suggest was the pinnacle of the commercial sector's embracing of DAB. This date also represents the end of the period of cooperation and therefore the end of a unique era in the history of the long relationship between the BBC and commercial radio. I believe 2002/03 may be recorded as the zenith of not just DAB in the UK but also of the relationship between the BBC and its rivals.

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[21] GCap Digital Stations for the Chop. *The Guardian*, 11 February 2008.
[22] Channel 4 Axes Radio Projects. *The Guardian*, 10 October 2008.
[23] Digital Radio Action Plan. Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 9 January 2014.
[24] See Literature Review below.

The research is not intended to merely represent a continuation of a historical narrative but instead highlight a period of flux within the UK radio industry and also account for the changing roles of the BBC and the commercial sector in this new era. The project highlights how both entities reached a point of equality at this time and reveals how their respective and joint actions came to be driven by a desire to consolidate the industry as a whole rather than simply their own separate positions, which may have been the case previously. In studying this particular area, I seek to address a significant gap in existing research which generally tends to fall into two well-trodden areas namely; the history of the BBC and the history of the commercial sector. My findings instead focus on the state of relations between the two and on what has been a largely neglected aspect of this relationship: the notion that cooperation could emerge from what has historically been considered a distant relationship.

Methodology

I see the thesis sitting in a number of academic fields. Due to the specific nature of the subject under consideration, it rests firmly within the discipline of radio studies but also contributes to the field of broadcasting history which forms a subset of the wider domain of media history which in itself has been referred to as either the 'neglected child of media studies' (Brugger and Kolstrup 2002) or the 'neglected grandparent of media studies' (Curran 2002, p3). The reason for its neglect as a subject for serious consideration - whichever familial position it holds - is sometimes levelled at the scepticism within the academic community itself and particularly among traditional historians who were mostly inclined to be dismissive (Allan 2015, p358). Writing in 1994 Dahl (1994) asks:

> What exactly is the object of media history and to what extent is there
> such a thing as a proper historical study of the communication media,
> recognizable as a discipline on its own merits and not just as a
> hyphenated offshoot of technological or cultural history?

In replying to this, one can cite O'Malley (2002) who believes that traditionally there was little concern regarding the historical influence of the media but after 2000 this

changed as the study of the history of individual media forms became more developed as the result of:

> a slow realisation by academics that the mass media and communications were pervasive elements of nineteenth and twentieth century societies and as such had to move from the margins towards the centre of historical investigation.

Thus we see in more recent times a greater appreciation of the field of media history resulting from the subject's expansion from simple historical account and into the domain of social and cultural subjectivity. The area of broadcasting history has benefitted from this wider interpretation, as studies of various aspects of radio and television history demonstrate the historiographical importance of these media to our greater appreciation of the overall subject area of media studies.

Curran (2002, p3) claims media historians labour in the shadows because of their 'often narrowly specialized scholarship' but likewise, one of Curran's main contributions to media studies is his insistence on the centrality of history, his goal 'to advance a tradition of media history that seeks ambitiously to situate historical investigation of the media in a wider societal context' (Curran 2008, p20). Curran 2002, p3) highlights how media history has tended to be dominated by technological determinist accounts and tries to overcome this narrow aspect of research by offering a series of competing narratives. Avoiding a narrow historical remit is central to this thesis. Rather than succumb to any accusation of merely adding to a well established narrative of 'the history of radio' I hope to paint a wider picture of the historical impact of what I call the DAB era and avoid what Long and Wall (2012, p48) refer to as the 'historiographical trap' of technological determinism by simply privileging the impact of DAB technology. Instead I pursue a wider social history (in terms of audience choice), political history (in terms of governmental digital policy) and most importantly, organizational history (in terms of the interplay between actors in the radio industry) thus portraying an aspect of media history with wider repercussions.

The inherent danger in any historical study of the British media, particularly in relation to television or radio, is the pre-eminent role played by the BBC and therefore the tendency to produce single layered institutional history. Briggs (1995 Vols 1-5) is the

seminal history of the BBC, and worthy of that accolade, but has been challenged by some media historians for providing a standardized corporate history. For example, Hajkowski (2010, p8) notes:

> In addition to the organization and development of radio, Briggs examines the relationship between the BBC and the government, technological change, the manufacture and marketing of receivers, and the impact of radio on social habits and leisure. However, Briggs ultimately produces a top-down, institutional history of the BBC… As a consequence, Briggs's *History* gives short shrift to certain aspects of broadcasting.

Hajkowski is concerned that the treatment of interdisciplinary issues is limited with too much emphasis on broad analyses and Briggs (1980) himself did go on to lament the omission of a greater study of cultural factors in his magnum opus.[25] This study aims to avoid the pitfall of solely examining the BBC's role as the dominant player without adding equal weight to its competitors nor indeed to the competing elements within the organisation itself and most importantly, the social and cultural influences and effects. While any study of the UK radio industry will necessarily involve a significant appraisal of the BBC due to its position, both historical and contemporary, I wish to obviate the tendency in such studies to attach a pre-eminent role for the BBC and indeed challenge any such assertion in the period of DAB. Rather than representing a mere adjunct to BBC radio history, this study instead demonstrates how a shift in the BBC's position came about and placed it on a more equal footing with the commercial sector – this in itself is a core argument which will emerge from Section 2 of the thesis after having been set in a comparative context in Section 1. As for the commercial sector, again I avoid the simple historical narrative and likewise focus on its rapport with the BBC, and in doing so reveal an often overlooked attribute of the former i.e. its crucial role at various points in the history of radio, none more so than in the DAB era, thus adopting an often neglected position, namely one that celebrates the role played by commercial radio. The thesis therefore represents a major contribution to the study of the overall UK radio industry. It does this by accounting for its continued survival and crucially in weighing up the roles played by both the BBC and the commercial sector in ensuring

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[25] Hajkowski levels the same criticism at another influential work of broadcasting history; Scannell and Cardiff (1991).

that survival. In historiographical terms this avoids the danger often associated with media studies in general which Pickering (2015, p16) has identified as proceeding:

> Without an integral historical perspective informing its key questions
> and pre-occupations, and without an active historicizing impulse
> generating major research questions and methods of enquiry. This is
> precisely why, against the strident emphasis on newness and nowness,
> we need to be… more receptive to slower processes of cultural change
> and adaptation, longer-term institutional formations and resilient structural
> continuities.

As described, part of the thesis is a historical account and is necessary in setting the scene. Much of the research with regard to this comes from secondary sources cited in the reference section,[26] as well as primary source material mostly located at the BBC Written Archives in Caversham. In the footnotes, material from the BBC Written Archives is clearly marked BBC WAC (Written Archives Caversham)[27] followed by the relevant file number. Also, *Ariel* refers to the name of the BBC's own internal publication for staff which is useful for scrutinizing policy which the corporation felt necessary to disseminate among its employees.[28] One might argue a biased approach in consulting solely BBC sources in analysing the early years but little exists in terms of material held by competitors. The BBC archives do however also contain many commercial sector publications as well as newspaper articles which add a certain balance to the corporation's own reports and minutes of meetings and these are bolstered by other articles and opinions held at the British Library newspaper archive. Where possible, information produced directly by the commercial sector is included although a lack of source material around areas such as pirate radio means a greater reliance on biography and press material is used for consultation. Things become a little simpler with regard to the early days of independent and commercial radio as documentary evidence from the archives of stations and regulatory bodies become more accessible. As in the case of BBC, this material is cited to highlight attitudes within the commercial sector.

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[26] See Notes on Existing Literature below.

[27] The BBC Written Archives centre is based at Caversham in Berkshire.

[28] First published in 1936, *Ariel* has always been available to the public via subscription or since 2011 free online; http://www.bbc.co.uk/ariel/

As for the DAB era, for a while I worked in the department at the BBC responsible for its development as a platform and therefore have had access to a significant amount of documentation and indeed opinion from the time. Some of this does not form part of the BBC Written Archives depository and therefore is marked as being from the author's own collection.[29] This of course raises important ethical questions relating to reportage and critique. As a member of BBC staff it is impressed upon me that the need for impartiality is of huge importance and the research is not based on any BBC influence but rather a non-partisan critique of a specific period in radio history. It also means critically appraising BBC policy to the same degree as commercial sector policy in order to construct an accurate historical account. To conduct research, whether through analysis of primary documentation or through interviews, I have been careful to adhere to a policy of neutrality through the use of various participatory research methods (Thomas 2003, p75).

I have been able to interview the leading figures at the BBC who were part of the promotion of DAB and indeed, such was the close relationship with commercial sector at the time that I have also been able to interview significant people from that sector as well. The interviewees were selected because of their crucial roles at the time. Simon Nelson was Controller of BBC Radio & Music Interactive whose responsibility it was to implement the BBC's DAB strategy and could therefore provide a BBC policy perspective. Lindsay Cornell was a BBC engineer who had been involved in the early days of DAB at the BBC before going on to oversee its technical roll-out and was therefore the appropriate person to consult regarding DAB technology. Quentin Howard I identified as a key DAB champion within the commercial sector and was the driving force behind many of that sector's DAB initiatives. Glyn Jones was a former head of DAB at the BBC who went on to play a similar role in the commercial sector thus giving him an insight into both bodies. The interviews were carried out early in the research process with the exception of Glyn Jones who was interviewed later[30] when I realised his contribution would be useful. They were chosen not simply to address questions of balance but because I believe these people held important positions at a critical stage in the timeline of DAB - at the very point when cooperation had reached its zenith and was perhaps in the early stages of reverting. This meant that responses were I believe, more candid and not tempered by any notion of unity of response.

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[29] None of this is marked as confidential.

[30] For dates see References section.

Interviewees were asked similar structured questions in order to provide for accuracy and then more open-ended questions in order to reveal any differing perspectives and challenged on their positions as well as being consulted on their views of other parties. Interviews were carried out not simply as a nod to the research technique of triangulation[31] i.e. in order to ensure the credibility and validity of primary source material, but to provide a sound qualitative dimension to the research through the assessment of attitudes within the BBC and the commercial sector towards DAB, not just as a new technology in itself but its potentiality for the industry and its basis for altering the roles of the major players therein. I believe the selection of candidates for interview, as well as the method of interviewing, helped collect sets of data which represented sound qualitative research (see King and Horrocks 2010) and as a number of the interviewees are no longer involved in DAB, their contributions provide a unique historical perspective.

I note the criticism that there is a danger of an inevitable subjectivity permeating the research due to the fact that I am researching an organisation I currently work for. I can say that my employer is aware of the nature of my research and there never has been any attempt to influence it. A neutral stance is essential in any research which requires an in-depth study of competing organisations, not simply to maintain objectivity in the research process, but also to ensure accuracy in the delivery of the research project, and in order to ensure it stands up as a piece of systematic work imbued with the qualities of impartiality and authenticity. Any accusation of researcher bias is clearly not evidenced from within the text as I have diligently given equal weight to the scrutiny of the commercial sector. I believe being a member of BBC staff actually instils in me an even greater need to produce an unbiased piece of work so as to avoid any accusations of partiality and lends itself to the need to conduct the research with an exceptional rigour which characterises this thesis.

A desire to pursue research in this area emanates from a very simplistic observation i.e. the sudden appearance of competing and distant forces conjoining on platforms to herald a new era of camaraderie. From this, questions arose as to what were the driving forces behind this and what necessitated it? What was then required was an objective study into the exact historical nature of the relationship in order to accurately define its status, before proceeding to use appropriate sources to ascertain how this status changed

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[31] See Denzin (1978).

and why. The thesis represents a considered study of a period in UK radio history and one which I propose as being of huge significance. Rather than pursue a simplistic account, I employ primary sources and interview material to shine a light on what I consider to be a period of immense change. I also use secondary sources to provide appropriate historical context in order to bolster this viewpoint. In studying the history of relations between the BBC and the commercial radio sector and then demonstrating how such relations were altered by the emergence of a new technology I hope to provide a robust study of a fascinating period in radio history and add a significant contribution to existing knowledge in the field.

Notes on Existing Literature

As stated, the particular area of research encompasses a number of academic fields namely, radio studies, broadcasting history, media history in general but it also covers other subjects areas such as organisational studies and contemporary social and technological history of the media. To that end, a wide range of secondary source material has been consulted. I would like to point out at this stage that I have omitted television from this study and its competitive impact on BBC Radio, whether that be from the BBC's own television service or from commercial television. The BBC's pre-war television service and its post-war continuation as well as the arrival of a commercial television service in 1955, the launch of a second BBC channel in 1964 and the later advent of Channel 4 (1982), Breakfast TV (1983) and BSkyB (1990) could all be argued to have had an effect on radio but this would be better served by a separate inquiry. Instead I wish to adhere to the domain of radio.

Radio studies (the main academic discipline within which my research lies) is a relatively small yet growing field and one ripe for research on a myriad of levels. In terms of treatises pertinent to my actual research, i.e. digital radio and the UK radio industry, there are few specific works. Indeed many of the sources I have identified usually cover my particular area of interest merely as a smaller part of a much wider examination of radio in the form of academic textbooks geared to furnishing the reader with an adequate understanding of radio history, techniques, forms and contexts (e.g, Wilby and Conroy 1994, Fleming 2002 and Starkey 2004). Crisell (2002a) gives a very brief explanation of DAB and the internet as emerging broadcasting platforms, although

when the book was first published in 1997 this was still very much an engineer's domain rather than a policy maker's and even when the second edition was published in 2002 the position of DAB in the UK had only just taken root.

In terms of other significant studies of the history of radio, virtually none are current enough to cover the period of my research i.e. circa 1985 to 2003. Indeed the last instalment of the major work in the field, Briggs's *History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* was published in 1995, although it only covers the period up to 1974. This is of course an ongoing historical project with Jean Seaton[32] authoring the next instalment, which was published in 2015 (Seaton 2015). This book covers the years 1974 to 1987 and therefore does not cover the digitalisation of British broadcasting as this was still at its early research and development stage. Unlike Briggs's previous volumes, the notion of technology and its impact is largely absent from Seaton's work as is the world of commercial radio, in fact there are only a few paragraphs devoted to the effect of independent radio services on the BBC. Seaton's book concentrates largely on the BBC during the years of study hence its subtitle *The BBC and the Nation*, so it remains to be seen whether subsequent volumes will include the important role of the commercial radio sector which I hope to reflect in this thesis and which ought to be reflected in any publication that presumes a study of British broadcasting.

In terms of the history of the BBC then Briggs (1995)[33] of course provides the standard narrative. It is tempting to cite Briggs often when describing early BBC history simply because he covers a wide range of issues with forensic use of material from the BBC Written Archives. When consulting the archive it was often the case that relevant documentation was already referenced in Briggs so I have endeavoured to only re-use such documentation when necessary and instead use the archive resource to provide relevant source material which has not already been highlighted in Briggs. Other texts which provide use general interpretations of BBC history include Street (2002) and Crisell (2002a) while other monographs provide more useful era or subject specific studies such as Born (2004), Street (2006) and Hendy (2007). As well as this, autobiographical sources provide interesting insights to the workings of the corporation particularly at Director General level, for example Curran (1979), Milne (1988), Birt

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[32] Professor of Media History at the University of Westminster and Official Historian of the BBC.
[33] For consistency I reference the 1995 republished volumes 1-5 rather than the original publication dates for each of the earlier volumes.

(2002) and Dyke (2005). Such memoirs tend to cover a very wide range of issues thus sometimes leaving the researcher in a specific subject area, such as radio, sometimes lamenting the paucity of analysis. They do nevertheless provide the view from the top and even cursory comments can provide the necessary evidence on which to base one's conclusions. I have employed secondary sources examining BBC history in order to ascertain their contribution to my particular area of research, namely the relationship between the BBC and the commercial sector and have done so in order to highlight my own data findings which have previously not been exposed in a way which is necessary for a study of this particular facet of broadcasting history. This has involved interrogating secondary sources in order to highlight their inadequacies, if any, and thus emphasise my peculiar contribution to knowledge.

As for the relationships between the BBC and the commercial sector, the early period up to 1945 is covered by Street (2006) and receives able treatment by Briggs (1995) for the period up to 1974. Beyond the 1970s however, any significant in-depth study of either is sadly lacking. Studies specific to the commercial sector are particularly inadequate. Historical accounts of Radio Luxembourg tend to form only part of broader texts (Wood 1992) or for pirate radio stations come largely from former presenters or fans who offer up interesting diary type formats but which do not provide any greater analysis of the role of these stations (Skues 1994, Humphries 2003, Lodge 2010). As for the arrival of independent radio and then commercial radio after 1973, there is a genuine dearth of serious academic study in book form. This lack of appraisal was however rectified with the publication of Stoller's work on the history of the commercial sector (Stoller 2010) - a history which succeeds in intertwining chronology and issues in a sound academic study. As Stoller's volume is the sole representation of a broad, all-encapsulating history of the commercial sector, it is difficult to cover the period under consideration without often referring to his account. In my study of the commercial sector therefore, Stoller's work is referenced heavily, simply because it is such a strong secondary source. However I am keenly aware of his former role within the industry as Chief Executive of the Radio Authority from 1995 to 2003 and therefore have endeavoured where possible to introduce primary source material and other secondary source content where appropriate and indeed use these to defend any areas of Stoller's findings which I find worthy of dispute. In referencing Stoller's book I am aware that his work focuses solely on that sector and does not reflect the roles of both the commercial sector and the BBC alongside each other, which is a fundamental aspect of

this thesis. In fact this is one significant weakness in Stoller's work i.e. it fails to address the wider issue of the dynamics within the industry as a whole. I argue that the BBC and the commercial sector have both played important roles over the course of the history of radio in the UK and indeed that in the DAB era their roles may be considered to have been of equal value. This is somewhat overlooked by Stoller which means his work remains purely a history of commercial radio without much reference to the BBC, nor relations between both parties, which I believe to be critical in any history of either. No doubt Stoller's use of particular archive material to which he had unique access provides a truly fascinating insight into specific areas of commercial radio history but he offers little in terms of analysing how the BBC impacted on commercial radio and vice versa. Any study of either party requires, I believe, significant reference to the other if one is to produce an account which goes beyond the basic historical narrative and provides for a more considered appraisal - something which I see as a core of my own research.

The subject of DAB finds coverage in many texts as a something worth mentioning rather than as a subject worthy of analysis with its own volume. These may be works in the field of radio studies (Street 2002, Crisell 2003a) or works in the broader area of communication technology (Lax 2009). Hendy (2000a) does provide a considered and prescient analysis of the emerging DAB technology along with an excellent introduction to the structures and economics of the radio industry, but again this forms one chapter in what is a very useful text for students of radio and which is now crying out for a second edition in order to bring that particular chapter up to date. A more recent work is the O'Neill et al (2010) study of digital radio in Europe which comes closest to my own area of research in that it offers perspectives on the technologies and policies utilized to promote digital radio across Europe.

In perusing secondary sources my aim has been to examine them particularly for elements of comparative analysis and interpretation and have cited those which offer contributions which render my own arguments more pertinent and help bolster my own critical investigation rather than simply adding to historical reportage, thus ensuring my own work addresses what I believe to be a significant gap in the existing literature. It is also worth pointing out a number of other useful broader secondary sources at this point namely Briggs and Burke (2002) which not only acts as a historical reference but

provides a suitable model for studying media within a social and historical context. Also, Street (2002) provides a useful reference source and chronology.

In addressing the question of how DAB changed the relationship between the BBC and the commercial radio sector I intend to expose an area which has undergone little academic inquiry and which reveals an important period of change within the BBC, the commercial sector and the UK radio industry as a whole. This investigation explores the totality of an ongoing relationship and examines the factors that caused that relationship to alter. I set out to describe the nature of the relationship between the BBC and the commercial sector then demonstrate how and why that relationship underwent significant change in the DAB era. By using various sources I hope to illustrate that this was a period of flux and therefore one ripe for scrutiny. In doing so, I hope the reader will be in the position to reflect upon emergent issues which have not been readily apparent in previous literature but which I hope arise from this, such as; why was cooperation rarely pursued previously? Did cooperation ultimately bring benefits to the industry? And, what roles have the BBC and the commercial sector played in the survival of radio?

As a piece of research I believe it is strengthened by its objectivity and impartiality and its investment in the critical approach to media history by examining what I hold to be an important period of study. This holds value for the industry as it reveals its very nature and its potentialities. It also holds value for academia by highlighting a landmark period in radio history which requires appraisal, thus contributing significantly to an area of study, namely *Radio Studies,* which has, in recent years, witnessed a flurry of worthy academic research (Lewis 2004, Garner 2004). I therefore hope this thesis meets the ongoing challenge of helping radio emerge from what Garner (2003) describes as 'the shadows of critical neglect'.

SECTION 1

THE BBC AND THE COMMERCIAL RADIO SECTOR:
THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Chapter 1

The Emergence of an Industry:
The BBC and its Competitors,
1922 - 1967

This chapter begins with the formation of the BBC as a result of competition between radio receiving set manufacturers who created a single organisation to essentially build an industry. Once that industry became established, other actors became motivated to develop a presence within it by seizing upon the inherent weaknesses of the BBC model. Thus we see the emergence of two tiers of the UK radio broadcasting industry in the 1930s before the BBC regained its monopoly during the period of the Second World War. After the war the BBC amended its portfolio in a pre-emptive attempt to maintain its position but faced renewed threats in the form of Radio Luxembourg and then the pirate radio stations.

During the course of this chapter I hope to identify the various strands of competition affecting the BBC up until the arrival of a commercial entity created by statute, and examine the BBC's reactions to these previous incarnations. This is a cursory appraisal of the first forty years of radio in the UK mainly because this early history is an area which has received a number of academic treatments already from Briggs (1995), Crisell (1997) and Street (2002). A number of more specialist treatises also ably cover various aspects of the period including the early days of broadcasting (Baker 1970, Hennessy 2006), the BBC and its competitors (Browne 1985, Street 2006), the BBC during the Second World War (Baade 2012, Havers 2007, Nicholas 1996) and pirate radio (Boyd 1986, Chapman 1992). The chapter therefore concentrates on giving a brief outline of the competitive forces at work over the period and forms a backdrop for the more in-depth analysis which occurs from Chapter 2 onwards.

From New Technology to New Industry, 1896 - 1939

Guglielmo Marconi arrived in Britain in 1896 to continue his experiments into 'transmitting electrical impulses and signals'[34] which he had been carrying out in his native Italy over the previous few years (Baker 1970, p25). By 1922 the Marconi Company was broadcasting regularly from its station in Writtle (2MT) and from its headquarters in central London (2LO) (Hennessy 2005, p104) but these were by no means the only stations now in the UK, nor was Marconi the only business enterprise involved as the industry expanded. During 1922 we first witness the new phenomenon

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[34] Improvements in Transmitting Electrical Impulses and Signals, and in Apparatus therefor. GB Patent Office number: GB12039, 2 June 1896.

of competition of the airwaves among various enterprises. As well as Marconi, Metropolitan Vickers, Western Electric, General Electric, Radio Communication and British Thomson-Houston were the six big players in an industry of many companies all striving to implant radio across the UK (Street 2002, p27). This was however leading to two distinct problems. Firstly, the airwaves were becoming cluttered as more and more broadcasters came on board and secondly, the Marconi Company was rapidly establishing a monopoly as the strongest actor on the broadcasting stage, towering above the many smaller enterprises. In essence, by 1922 the UK radio industry was one characterised by a vast number of small operators creating chaos due to the limited availability of wavelengths while at the same time dominated by a formidable large player, a scenario which would characterise the radio landscape some 70 years later.

In order to avoid chaos and congestion on the airwaves, the Post Office announced it would licence a limited number of broadcasting stations across the country to be run by the manufacturers of wireless apparatus. This led to the emergence of a single, powerful broadcasting service, the British Broadcasting Company, which was formed on 18 October 1922 and daily broadcasts from the existing 2LO studios began on 14 November 1922 with local services then springing up across the country. By 1925 a national network was established and with the opening of the Daventry transmitter[35] that same year, around 80-85% of the UK population could now potentially receive wireless (Varrall 2012, p275).

With the public's insatiable demand for wireless programmes rising, the Government set up the Crawford Committee which reported to Parliament in March 1926.[36] John Reith[37] by this time was developing his own philosophy of British broadcasting in which he wanted the British Broadcasting Company to become a wholly public institution free from any commercial and political pressures. The Crawford Committee thought along similar lines and proposed the establishment, through Royal Charter, of a single, independent organisation charged with the task of providing a service in the national interest. The new British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) came into being on 1 January 1927 securing a single national service covering the entire UK as well as

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[35] The Daventry transmitter opened on 27 July 1925 and was the world's first Long Wave transmitting station. http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p027c6h8

[36] Report of the Broadcasting Committee 1926 (Crawford Report). Cmd 2599. London HMSO.

[37] General Manager of the British Broadcasting Company and later to become the first Director General of the BBC. See Reith (1924) and Reith (1949) for his own personal experiences of the era.

more focused regional services. This provision helped the BBC secure for itself an almost sacrosanct position amongst the listening public. The BBC's desire to use its monopoly position to create a unique broadcasting model was aided on one hand by technological advances (transmitters) and on the other, governmental authority (charter) which:

> strongly endorsed John Reith's eloquent re-articulation of the national function of the BBC, resulting in the transformation of an awkwardly coordinated private enterprise into a ground-breaking public corporation (Hilmes 2012, p49).

Although formed from the embers of competition to create a single broadcasting body, the very notion of competition was to find a new face. In 1925 Captain Leonard Plugge[38] persuaded Selfridge's department store in London to sponsor a fashion talk which was broadcast from the Eiffel Tower in Paris towards the UK. This transmission, though making practically no impression upon British listeners,[39] did nevertheless mark the arrival of competition in what was essentially a BBC controlled arena. The further encroachment of competitors took the form of broadcasts from foreign stations targeting audiences in Britain and it was not done stealthily. By 1928 when the first experimental broadcasts began to appear with a degree of regularity the BBC was undoubtedly aware of their activities. The Foreign Director wrote to the Controller in November 1928:

> Hilversum is already transmitting a British advertiser's programmes announced in English, on Sundays, clashing with the Bach Cantatas.[40]

These broadcasts from Hilversum known as the *English Hour,* worked on the principle of British entrepreneurs buying airtime on existing European stations and selling this airtime on to advertisers who would sponsor the actual programmes, thus securing an outlet to commercially exploit their products. Hence these European stations had segments of their output in English directed solely towards a UK audience. Most of the press was able to report the transmission of such programmes and some sections even in a triumphalist manner:

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[38] For a biographical account of Plugge's life and involvement in radio see Wallis (2008).
[39] Only three people admitted to having heard the 15 minute broadcast by the actress Yvonne Georges (Woodhead 2012, p204).
[40] BBC WAC: R34/960 Commercial Broadcasting, 1928.

> The 100,000 listeners in the British Isles – the majority of whom are
> dissatisfied with the wireless offered them by the BBC – will be
> interested to learn that… the BBC is faced with the prospect of real
> and effective competition.[41]

For the BBC the short duration of the broadcasts, their relative infrequency and poor reception may have disguised the true potential of these stations, but figures collated by the corporation at the time on the UK advertising industry were revealing a business model with massive untapped potential. In 1928 UK advertisers bought 9 hours of foreign airtime, in 1929 75 hours and by 1930 this had risen to 300 hours.[42]

In 1929 a number of radio advertising agents formed Radio Publicity Ltd[43] which began transmitting programmes from Radio Paris, already a familiar station in the UK and one easily receivable during daylight hours. This was followed by the International Broadcasting Company (IBC) which was headed by Plugge, the man responsible for the Selfridge's broadcast of 1925. Radio Normandy began to broadcast IBC programmes from the town of Fecamp in October 1931. The new station's transmitter strength and proximity to the South coast of England meant its potential audience was huge, even bigger than its French equivalent (Kuhn 1995, p77) and advertisers found it an attractive publicity machine. While adopting a largely phlegmatic stance regarding stations such as Radio Paris and Radio Toulouse, the BBC now began to take notice and by November 1931 the Director General was writing to the Post Office seeking 'assistance in dealing with the operation of Radio Normandy.'[44]

The BBC's unease with Radio Normandy and the other continental stations broadcasting sponsored programmes in English to the UK was centred around the fact that blatant advertising was taking place. Advertising and sponsorship of any form was forbidden for the BBC and it was an area in which it had to tread carefully. Reith was regularly inundated with complaints from listeners regarding what they saw as possible breaches of the BBC's obligations or anything that looked like it:

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[41] *Sunday Dispatch*, 4 November, 1928.
[42] BBC WAC: R34/961 Policy, Commercial Broadcasting, 1945.
[43] Reconstituted as Radio Publicity (Universal) Ltd in 1930.
[44] Letter from Reith to Postmaster General, 16 November 1931. BBC WAC: E2/2/2 File 1.

Tonight in announcing Professor Simpson on the wireless his books
were enumerated as being published by the Sheldon Press at 2/6d each.
Is this advertising or is it not? I thought advertising was prohibited.[45]

At this point the effects on listening figures appeared to be a negligible factor for the BBC and certainly in the early 1930s there is little evidence of an understanding of listening figures or trends. If anything, the BBC and its supporters were more concerned with the standards of its competitors than any market impact, and a lax approach could be attributed to the attitude of the broadcasting elite towards the endeavours of Plugge and his cohorts:

I spent part of the afternoon listening to the European broadcast
programmes…Radio Paris…I heard two programmes of gramophone
records 'sponsored' by an establishment in Brixton Road. A more
disgusting display of musical depravity could not be conceived.
One song was supposed to represent a prisoner praying to his
"Gawd in 'eavan" and moaning his "Muvver".[46]

Most of the action taken in the wake of the continental stations becoming more established tended to centre around a lot of listening such as described above followed by letters of complaint to the Post Office and the Government, but there were also some clandestine operations aimed at gaining an insight into the workings of the companies involved in providing the programmes. There was certainly a series of memos circulating round Broadcasting House at the time with information gleaned from various members of BBC staff who passed on any information they could uncover regarding the running of the publicity houses:

Formerly they rented two telephones, but have given one up. The
personnel of the office consists of Savi, an Indian or Anglo-Indian,
with a young girl to answer telephone calls etc… It is said in Fleet
Street that Mr Savi takes on any cause he can get hold of and runs
a very low-down type of publicity establishment. It is understood that

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[45] Letter to Director General from listener John Nayler, Cardiff. BBC WAC: R34/1 Policy Advertising 1924-1939.
[46] Letter from A.R. Burrows, Secretary General, Union International de Rediffusion to BBC, 10 Oct 1932. BBC WAC: E2/2/2 File 1.

for purposes of this campaign Savi is financed by Plugge.[47]

Radio Normandy was fast becoming a popular radio station for the population in the southern part of the UK (Briggs 1995, vol 2, p361). Plugge, also aware that the BBC was complaining to the Post Office, initiated his own campaign called Hands off Radio Normandy under a body called the League of Freedom based in Berners Street W1 (Browne 1985), the aim being to get public opinion on his side by claiming the BBC was using unfair means such as diplomatic channels[48] to curtail the broadcasts that 61% of the British population enjoyed and which were sponsored by British firms employing thousands of British workers (Browne ibid). Radio Normandy was becoming a thorn in the side for the BBC from its office just round the corner from Broadcasting House, but it was no longer the most significant source for concern as soon it would be overtaken in the popularity stakes by another station based on the continent.

In 1933 Radio Luxembourg began transmitting commercial programmes in English and this sent ripples of concern through established broadcasting concerns including the International Broadcasting Union (IBU)[49] whose Secretary General A.R. Burrows wrote to the BBC Chairman in respect of the fact that Radio Luxembourg had constructed a powerful transmitting station, unique in Europe:

> I want to discuss the most diplomatic method of handling the delicate
> situation which is already foreseen… in connection with the opening
> of Radio Luxembourg and the efforts which are now being made to
> obtain control of other European stations for advertising purposes.
> It looks as though the use of broadcasting stations for advertising
> purposes will be unavoidable once Luxembourg has begun to shout
> with a loud voice all over European territory.[50]

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[47] Internal memo from Stephen Tallents, 29 November 1935. BBC WAC: R34/959.

[48] For example the BBC had approached the Spanish Ambassador to London regarding English language programmes emanating from Spain. BBC WAC: E2/2/2, Advertising in English by Foreign Stations, 1935.

[49] Formed in 1929, the IBU aimed to promote exchanges between European public service broadcasters and mediate in technical disputes. It was the precursor to the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), formed in 1950. In some early BBC documentation the acronym UIR is used referring to the French; Union Internationale de Radiophonie.

[50] Letter from A.R. Burrows (Secretary General, IBU) to Sir Charles Carpendale (BBC Chairman) December 31 1931. BBC WAC: E18/283/1.

By the end of 1933 Radio Luxembourg was broadcasting across large parts of the UK. Not only that but Luxembourg was transmitting on Long Wave wavelengths outside the accepted broadcasting bands as agreed at the Prague Conference of 1929[51] and the Lucerne Plan of 1933.[52] The IBU condemned the actions of Radio Luxembourg and the BBC invited a representative from Radio Luxembourg to Broadcasting House on 24 June 1933 to explain their actions. Any sympathy for the BBC was not evident as Monsieur Tabouis explained his company's justification for its actions and outlined its plans for 'creating an international station which would compete with the BBC.'[53] Radio Luxembourg was adamant that it wished to build on its footprint in Britain and eventually it would dwarf all other continental stations transmitting to the UK.

The BBC had tried all sorts of tactics to quell the competitive presence of the continental stations ranging from pressure on the host Governments, action through the IBU, direct negotiations with the companies themselves, and coordinated attacks alongside the National Press Association 'but all to no avail.'[54] Indirect pressure was also applied by denying the continental stations any facilities or programme material they required. For example, Radio Luxembourg approached the Post Office to request taking the 1937 Coronation programme for re-broadcast which the Post Office duly denied to them.[55] There was also 'considerable frustration at hearing BBC Dance Orchestra records being played by Luxembourg.'[56]

Another tactic was to apply pressure on the BBC's own broadcasters and artists. Some high profile BBC personalities who broadcast on the BBC and then also offered their services for the studios of Radio Publicity, IBC or J Walter Thompson, soon found themselves walking a precarious tightrope as was evident in the case of Christopher Stone, often considered to be the BBC's first disc jockey (Frith 2013, p284):

> There remains to consider what action we should take especially as
> Luxembourg is the most notorious of the 'pirates'… There is the view

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[51] Meeting of the IBU Technical Committee, Prague, 4 April 1929 to agree on the partition of wavelengths (See Lommers 2012, p93).
[52] Lucerne Plan for the Allocation of Radio Broadcasting Frequencies. Annex to the European Broadcasting Convention, Lucerne, 19 June 1933 (See Pawley 1972, p212).
[53] BBC WAC: E18/283/2. International Organisations. UIR: Radio Luxembourg.
[54] Commercial Broadcasting History. BBC WAC: R34/961 Policy.
[55] BBC WAC: E18/283/6. International Organisations. UIR: Radio Luxembourg.
[56] BBC WAC: E18/283/5. International Organisations. UIR: Radio Luxembourg.

that while this thing is going on Mr Stone's engagements with us
should be gradually reduced.[57]

Stone was not the only name to be affected as the minutes of a meeting to discuss Radio Luxembourg's programming reveal.[58] It was decided that an informal warning be disseminated among variety artists to the effect that they would be prejudicing their position within the BBC by getting involved in broadcasts from Luxembourg. The minutes conclude with the thought that more drastic action ought to be taken against artists such as comedians Clapham and Dwyer who were primarily BBC artists in that their popularity was deemed 'entirely due to the BBC and no one else.'[59] A formal policy was adopted and staff became aware of it, they could no longer have the best of both worlds:

> Will departmental executives kindly cause it to be known among artists
> that the practice of the Luxembourg station to transmit programmes in
> the English language especially for reception by listeners in this
> country is contrary to British policy and therefore disapproved of by
> the corporation.[60]

In June 1935 the BBC continued its diplomatic efforts by meeting with representatives from the Government of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and while the latter made clear it had no wish to offend the BBC, it argued that the broadcasts 'were not in conflict with any IBU resolution as such resolutions were only directed towards the prohibition of political propaganda and not commercial advertising.'[61] Radio Luxembourg itself told the BBC that any ban on its activities could not be enforced and even if it were, the broadcasts would only continue from Normandy or Paris or any one of the other stations, and that with the rapid development of Short Wave transmissions, such advertising could soon be emanating from stations in the USA, a prediction which never materialised.[62]

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[57] Internal memo from Gladstone Murray, 14 August 1934. BBC WAC: E18/283/3
International Organisations. UIR: Radio Luxembourg.
[58] Notes from meeting to discuss Radio Luxembourg programming, 29 August 1934. BBC WAC: E18/283/3. International Organisations. UIR: Radio Luxembourg.
[59] ibid.
[60] Internal Memo, 31 August 1934. BBC WAC: E18/283/3.
[61] BBC WAC: E18/237/7.
[62] BBC WAC: E18/237/7.

Having failed in its attempts at employing diplomacy and recourse to international agreements to quell the activities of Radio Luxembourg, and also having warned its own staff of dabbling in broadcasts from abroad, the BBC decided it was time to finally engage in a battle on the airwaves. In the latter half of the decade Radio Luxembourg was hugely popular and was hitting the BBC where it hurt most, namely at times when the BBC was not on air and particularly on Sundays when its audience figures in Britain were greater than for the rest of the week (Fortner 2005, p51). Reith's strict Presbyterianism (Milner 1983, Leishman 2006) meant he believed in upholding the sabbath, so entertainment of any sort could not be heard on the BBC on a Sunday. This became known as the BBC's Sunday Policy (Fortner 2005, p44) and was a stance upon which stations like Radio Luxembourg and Radio Normandy nurtured their popularity. It seemed that a more flexible approach to Sunday programming might be the only route left to take in order to at least counter balance the hegemony of the continentals in this battleground and discussions took place about 'revising the BBC's output on Sundays.'[63]

In dealing with the threat to its position vis-a-vis the commercial stations, the BBC eventually came to rely on audience and market research with the setting up of the BBC Audience Research department under Robert Silvey in October 1936.[64] Using statistical analysis the true impact of competition could now be calculated. Silvey and his staff could produce figures showing that the BBC lagged way behind Radios Luxembourg, Normandy and Lyons on Sundays[65] or that advertising expenditure on the continental stations had more than doubled each year between 1934 and 1937[66] proving that significant competition from continental stations was now a forceful reality.

BBC Return to Monopoly, Competitors Return to the Market, 1939 – 1955

At 11.15am on Sunday 3 September 1939, the country tuned into the BBC to learn from Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain that Britain was now at war with Germany.[67] Plans

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[63] Programme Revision, 22 April 1936. BBC WAC: R34/874/3 Policy, Sound Broadcasting, File 2B.
[64] For a detailed account of the workings of the department see Silvey (1974).
[65] Audiences for Foreign Programmes on Sundays, 4 February 1938. BBC WAC: R34/960.
[66] Radio Advertising, 21 October 1937. BBC WAC: R34/959.
[67] http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/ww2outbreak/

for broadcasting had been afoot in the preceding months within the BBC so that all domestic broadcasting became limited to a single national wavelength. During the course of the 1920s and 1930s the BBC had been offering two domestic services, the National Programme and the Regional Programme, both were now merged into a new network, the Home Service.

But for those seeking out the type of entertainment provided by the BBC or its competitors in the previous years then they were to be disappointed. Programme content on the new Home Service consisted largely of a 'staple diet of news, information and gramophone records' (Bathgate 2012, p95). While the public was of course hungry for information, the lack of entertaining output left many thinking 'broadcasting as they had known it had come to an end' (Bridson 1971, p72). Criticism came from listeners and the press and it continued to rise over the autumn of 1939. It would appear that the BBC, which had evidently gained an understanding of audience needs during the years of intense competition from Radio Normandy and Radio Luxembourg, was intent on eschewing any change to its programme output despite now having an open opportunity to consolidate its position, as Nicholas (1999, p63) observes:

> The conventional view of the BBC is of cumulative 'democratization'
> as the BBC became more obviously responsive to listeners' tastes.
> But even proponents of this view have underlined how contrived,
> patronizing and out of touch many of the BBC's 'people's' programmes
> were.

The declaration of war had a hugely detrimental effect on the commercial stations such as Radio Luxembourg and Radio Normandy. Where commercial radio existed 'it was expected to defer to the official voice' (Hobsbawm 1994, p196). Quite simply, the war put the commercial stations out of action. At a single stroke the Luxembourg government closed down Radio Luxembourg on 21 September 1939 in order to protect its neutrality, although it continued domestic broadcasts within Luxembourg until Germany invaded the country on 10 May 1940 and took over the station (Newton 2013).

Radio Normandy had one of its transmitters requisitioned by the French authorities but with the Fecamp transmitter still in its hands, the IBC quickly initiated plans to reinvent

itself as Radio International continuing to broadcast from Fecamp (Bathgate 2012, p97). Leonard Plugge led the IBC campaign to court British government support for running Radio International as a broadcasting service for British forces who began arriving in France through September 1939, although to no avail (Wallis 2008). The IBC then turned its attentions to the French government to keep the Fecamp transmitter in service for the allied troops, a step which was met more favourably (Plomley 1980, p165). Of course Radio International could also be picked up in Britain thus continuing the association with Radio Normandy, meaning listeners could still listen to familiar programmes and presenters. The IBC was keen to participate in the war that was also beginning over the airwaves. The BBC found itself under threat from a competitor which had proved a very worthy opponent throughout the 1930s in terms of the domestic audience and which was also now serving the British Expeditionary Force in France (Smalley 2015). Radio International eventually closed on orders from the French government on 3 January 1940 (Street 2006, p250). During the relatively short four months of its existence it had quickly re-implemented its broadcasting recipe of populist programming which had already brought it so much success and which it used to make headway on a more conservative BBC.

The period from September 1939 to January 1940 became almost the 1930s in a post-Rethian microcosm. Internal BBC research from November 1939 showed that the corporation was still losing out to other broadcasters with more than half of those whose opinion was sought agreeing to listening to foreign stations which still remained on air.[68] The most popular station at this time was Radio Hamburg, with half of those listening to foreign stations listening to it, although this may not be so surprising when it was the station from which Lord Haw-Haw's German propaganda broadcasts emanated (Kenny 2003). This research was quite startling in a period when one might have presumed the public would have been satisfied with the highly informative and formal output of the Home Service. Instead, it merely highlighted the fact that a programme of lighter content was what the audience desired. But of course it was not just the domestic audience that needed this attention. Radio International's prominence amongst British troops in France had created an enviable bond between home and abroad centred around a radio station. Briggs (1985, p186) believes that:

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[68] Silvey, R.J.E., 17 November 1939 *The Public's Attitude Towards the BBC and the Extent of Listening to Foreign Stations.* BBC Internal Memo. BBC: WAC R34/960

a fear of commercial interests as well as a desire to entertain the troops, galvanised the BBC.

And when Radio International stopped broadcasting on 3 January 1940, the BBC began its experimental Forces Broadcasting only a few days later on 7 January. On 29 November 1939, the BBC Control Board had agreed in principle that plans should be made for a 'special service for the forces'[69] with the term 'Service Programme' adopted within the BBC.[70] Following internal discussions a report called *Broadcasting to the Troops in France* was prepared in December 1939 (Briggs ibid, p116) which concluded with the need for an almost exclusively light service for the troops in France, but one which would also serve a domestic audience. This would not be the first time that the BBC would simply adopt the broadcasting processes of its competitors.

The new BBC Forces Programme was very much modelled on the programming model of Radio International and this was evident from the first broadcast of the variety show *Garrison Theatre* on Sunday 18 February 1940 which Baily (1968, p157) argues was 'the beginning of the end of treating Sunday as different to other days.' Within weeks, output on the Forces Programme, particularly on Sundays, began to reflect popular audience tastes. So we see the appearance of what are now deemed radio classics such as *Variety Bandbox* (1941), *Workers' Playtime* (1941) and *Music While You Work* (1940). Indeed Nicholas (1999, p71) argues that:

> The implications of the establishment of the Forces Programme were
> far-reaching, though few within the BBC were prepared to admit as
> much… it marked the most decisive break yet with the BBC's Reithian
> past.

Nicholas (ibid) also notes how a programme service aimed at British forces abroad found a presence in the listening habits of the domestic audience and points out that by 1941, 60% of the civilian public was regularly tuning into the Forces Programme in preference to the Home Service. Amongst what Nicholas (ibid) refers to as this 'ordinary listening public' she highlights working class housewives:

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[69] Control Board, Minutes, 29 November 1939. BBC WAC: E4/11.
[70] The title *Forces Programme* was formally adopted by Control Board on 3 January 1940. BBC WAC: E4/11.

whose existence as a significant component of the daily audience

was one of the BBC's more striking wartime discoveries.

Such discoveries began to alter BBC output and when the Forces Programme was renamed the General Forces Programme from 27 February 1944 it continued to maintain its distinction from the Home Service with a more populist schedule and more relaxed style and now officially available to both the domestic audience and the allied forces arriving in Europe. It is fair to say that the influx of Americans to the European theatre of conflict around this time had a huge effect on British radio too by lightening it even further. The American GIs complained about the BBC, they found 'the music dull, the humour alien and the announcers stiff' so much so that their response was to have their own radio network (Morley 2001, p2). Hence, the American Forces Network (AFN)[71] sought to provide a form of entertainment which American servicemen had been used to at home and this had the effect of impressing the indigenous British population too:

American musical influence was most profoundly felt through the

presence of U.S. troops in the country… and the programmes of the

American Forces Network (AFN). (Barnard 1989, p28).

Despite the popularity of the AFN, BBC Director General, Robert Foot and Editor-in-Chief William Haley[72] believed that the new element of choice in the BBC's offerings should 'cause what present demand there is for commercially provided competition to subside'.[73] This reveals that even after four years of a broadcasting monopoly, the BBC was still wary of the possibility of a commercial competitor arriving on the radio landscape at any time and particularly at this late point in the war. It is reasonable to suggest that possibly the broadcasts of the AFN were a sharp reminder of the commercial players who were no longer around and this American style broadcasting

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[71] Radio service for American forces originally formed by the US War Department as the Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS) on 26 May 1942.

[72] Robert Foot, Joint Director General of the BBC (with Cecil Graves), 1942-1943, Director General 1943-1944. Sir William Haley, Editor-in-Chief, 1943-1944, Director General of the BBC, 1944-1952.

[73] Note by Director General & Editor-in-Chief, 3 January 1944. Post War Planning, BBC WAC: R34/578/1.

would inform events in British radio twenty years later when the pirates adopted American techniques. But in the meantime the BBC had to address the question:

> How might British radio develop its own popular forms of expression, based firmly in British popular culture, that might resemble American practices somewhat but would not therefore be intrinsically, and dismissably, 'American'? (Hilmes 2003).

The BBC's decision to cater for British forces had the effect of aligning its programming more in relation to what the commercial stations had been offering before the outbreak of war. By 1945 the corporation had changed the style of content for which it was renowned through the introduction of a more vigorous tradition of speech and humour to broadcasting, one that was 'closer to the music hall tradition than the well-mannered 'variety' of pre-war programmes' (Curran and Seaton 2003, p144). Whatever the contribution of the Forces Programme to troop morale and to morale at home, it was also a good force for the BBC, as along with the Home Service and the Empire Service, it provided 'the necessary soundtrack to the difficult war years' (Stoller 2010, p15). It also produced a lighter alternative that would survive the war, which leads one to agree with the conclusion that 'the Second World War saved the BBC from itself' (Stoller ibid) largely by embracing a broadcasting model which had been developed by the commercial sector.

The success of the Forces Programme during the war meant that something of its character and appeal would have to be retained in the post-war era if the BBC was to maintain its position with the domestic audience in peace time. Discussions within the corporation regarding the post-war radio landscape had started early. Under Director Generals Foot and Graves,[74] planning had begun as early as January 1941 when the Control Board first began to mention post-war organisation and the potential of one wavelength carrying a 'Forces Programme/Radio Luxembourg type of material.'[75] By the end of 1942 thoughts about the future became formalised with the first of the Post War Planning Meetings which considered how the BBC should take the initiative on the

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[74] Robert Foot & Sir Cecil Graves were joint Directors General 1942-1943. Robert Foot was Director General 1943-1944.
[75] Note from S. de Lotbiniere (Outside Broadcasts) to Sir Cecil Graves (Deputy Director General), 1 January 1941. BBC WAC: R34/576, Post War Planning.

cessation of hostilities, how it should face 'potential competition from the possible re-emergence of sponsored programmes.'[76]

Three facts were evident on the post war horizon, firstly the BBC had a head start should any competitors enter the broadcasting arena, since it held a virtual monopoly position the UK. Secondly the Home Service, although not providing enough items for minority interests still represented a bastion of core BBC values and ought to target the entire UK population with a 'degree of culture which should be that which can be readily assimilated by ordinary people who care even a little about such things'.[77] And thirdly, the success of the Forces Programme was envisaged as a successful broadcasting model which should be consolidated in the form of a 'civilian programme of light character'.[78] It was a Senior Controller, Basil Nicolls, who sketched out in 1944 a scheme for a general 'Home Service' a 'light' programme and an 'Arts programme'[79] and in doing so also introduced the novel idea of these new BBC services not just being able to compete with external forces but also with each other; 'the objective is to allow the freest possible competition within the BBC's monopoly.'[80] Foot and Haley had already issued a statement in February about the future of BBC which stated that it should be 'responsible for all broadcasting in the UK', that it should be 'protected against commercial radio' and that the only element of competition 'should come within the corporation itself.'[81]

The policy of three services gained momentum throughout 1944 and was discussed at a BBC Board Meeting in August 1944 when Haley stated that the needs of the home audience; 'had been sacrificed during the course of the war and that greater choice should be made available after the war.'[82] He outlined the three programmes which the BBC wished to provide. The first would be a 'continuation of the existing Home Service, a home programme capable of separating up regionally.' The second would be

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[76] Post-War Planning Meeting minutes, 13 November 1942. BBC WAC R34/578/1.

[77] Editor-in-Chief, William Haley: The New Home Service, 18 February 1944. BBC WAC: R34/417, Home Service.

[78] Director General, William Haley, speech on Post-War Broadcasting at the Radio Industries Club Luncheon, 28 November 1944. BBC WAC: R34/580, Post War Planning.

[79] Basil Nicolls: Post-War Home Programme Set-Up, 21 December 1944. BBC WAC: R34/420, Home Services.

[80] ibid.

[81] Foot and Haley, statement on the Future of the BBC, February 1944. BBC WAC: R34/420, Home Services.

[82] BBC Board Meeting minutes, 10 August 1944. BBC WAC: R34/420, Home Services.

a 'lighter programme, based on the Forces Programme, carried on Long Wave and thus also available to troops abroad.' And, the third would be of a high cultural level, devoted to the arts, serious discussion and experiment.'[83] The Board agreed that all three should be made available as soon as possible after the end of hostilities, although the third might be delayed if the necessary wavelengths were not available.[84]

As the war in Europe came to an end on 8 May 1945, the BBC set in motion its plans for the three new networks. The *Radio Times* announced on 27 July 1945[85] that 'the BBC had served the nation at war and that it would do so as energetically and as imaginatively through the years of peace.' Two days later on 29 July, peacetime broadcasting resumed with the Home Service continuing as it was, only with six new regional services. The General Forces Programme was renamed the Light Programme and an announcement was made regarding a future Third Programme.[86] The country was beginning to return to some degree of normality after a long six years and the BBC thought it was too by offering a new range of choice catering for all tastes and satisfying those desperate for more than one single station in what was a 'grey post-war cultural landscape' (Martin 2000, p44).

While the Home Service was to continue in the same mould as before, it was the Light Programme which was to be the BBC's standard bearer of the type of programming which had been familiar to listeners of the Forces Programme or the pre-war commercial stations. Its remit was unequivocal in its embracing of the characteristics of these latter stations. It was to:

> interest listeners in life and in the world around them without at any
> moment failing to entertain them… meaning a strong foundation of
> entertainment programmes which are used to support our more serious
> offerings… the title 'Light' does not necessarily mean that the programme
> is lowbrow, but denotes that it is aimed at those who require relaxation

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[83] ibid.
[84] ibid.
[85] *Radio Times*, 27 July 1945.
[86] Programme Changeover Announcement, 29 July 1945. BBC WAC: R34/420, Home Services.

in their listening.[87]

The Light Programme worked. By October 1945 fifty one out of every one hundred home listeners were listening to it.[88] One year later the listening figures had increased by a fifth. By the late 1940s regular listeners were listening for an average of nine and a half hours a week as against seven hours a week in the case of Home Service listeners and three hours in the case of the Third Programme.[89] However it should be noted that as the fully national Light Programme extended its range and popularity, the Home Service, with its regional variants, continued in its role as the staple of the BBC. Lewis and Booth (1989, p78) reflect that there were still, 'strong elements of pre-war paternalism' in evidence with Home Service, as the BBC continued to dictate what was felt to be appropriate listening for the audience. The Third Programme also went on air on 29 September 1946, its aim to fulfil Haley's vision of a programme having a 'high cultural level, focussing on the arts, serious discussion and experiment.'[90] It came under fire however from some sections of the press for being 'obscure, dull and pretentious' with some asking how many people actually listened to it? (Carpenter 1996, p72). Others argued that what mattered was 'not the size of the audience but the quality of the programmes' for those interested in its output (Carpenter ibid, p80). The Third Programme's future would be characterised by such debate (Smith 2013) but it did achieve Haley's idea of providing a service for a minority audience, an ambition shared fifty years later when the BBC decided on which audiences to accommodate on its new digital radio services.

Much of the BBC's proactive policy-making in preparation for the end of the war was centred around consolidating its extant broadcasting monopoly and taking steps to secure that position by addressing audience needs, catering for those needs and thus denying a possible opening for any budding entrepreneur or any established organisation to gain a footing in the domestic British radio arena. After all, as Haley

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[87] Memo from T. Chalmers, Acting Controller, Light Programme to J. Langham. 13 May 1948. BBC WAC: R34/454/2, File 2A, Light Programme.
[88] The remaining forty nine were listening to the Home Service.
[89] BBC: A Review of Listener Research Findings. December 1949. BBC WAC: R34/454/2, Light Programme.
[90] Haley article on the new BBC services. *Radio Times,* 27 July 1945.

noted, 'today is still the hindsight of a closing era and tomorrow is the threshold of a new age'.[91]

But what was the status of Radio Normandy and Radio Luxembourg immediately after the war and were they intending to re-enter the radio market? For Radio Normandy it was unlikely it would return to the airwaves since the French government desired that radio would be used as a tool to 'serve the interests of the post-war state' the main aim of the Provisional Government of the French Republic confirming broadcasting now 'as a state monopoly with public service goals' (Kuhn 1995 p90). Radio Luxembourg did not suffer a similar fate. Haley, reported in May 1946 that Radio Luxembourg was to recommence full commercial broadcasting on 1 July and added that this meant it was time to 'look at possibly amending the output of the Home Service on Sundays and perhaps extending the hours of the Light Programme.'[92] Radio Luxembourg became the sole English language competitor for the BBC in the immediate years following the war. It had been a familiar station before the war so found no difficulty in attracting British listeners again. The BBC of course was wary of its arrival on British shores after almost seven years and was concerned about how 'the habit of listening to Radio Luxembourg, particularly along the South coast towns was growing rapidly.'[93] Also, on learning that the station was about to re-commence broadcasting, Haley was keen to 'examine areas of the BBC schedules which might need to be re-appraised if they were likely to be targeted by Radio Luxembourg.'[94] One thing that was clear however was that a policy of non-cooperation with competitors at any level remained intact. When the Director General of Radio Luxembourg wrote to his BBC counterpart asking if the corporation might consider taking part in a new programme looking at youth across different European countries, the answer was a definite 'no' and in fact the letter has scrawled across it in red ink by an unknown hand 'we do not want anything to do with them'.[95]

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[91] Memo from Haley to L. Wellington, 31 December 1945. BBC WAC: R34/420, Home Services.
[92] BBC Programme Policy Meeting Minutes, 21 May 1946. BBC WAC R34/454/1.
[93] Report by Kenneth Adam, Radio Luxembourg Developments July 1949. BBC WAC E1/1054.
[94] Haley to Programme Planning Meeting, 21 May 1946. BBC WAC: R34/420, Home Services.
[95] Letter from R.L. Peulvey, Directeur General Radio Luxembourg, 24 March 1947. BBC WAC E1/1054.

Radio Luxembourg was catering for a young constituency interested in the booming musical culture of rock and roll. However, a BBC Audience research report from 1954 suggests it was unlikely that Radio Luxembourg's audiences were causing a reduction in listening to the BBC but rather that Radio Luxembourg had picked up an audience 'from amongst people who weren't previously finding broadcasts to their tastes in the BBC schedules.'[96] Figures showed on Sundays, Radio Luxembourg had a larger audience than the Home Service and sometimes rivalled the Light Programme too. Also, the Luxembourg audience on Mondays to Fridays was comparable to the Home Service,[97] but despite these figures the BBC stance remained the same i.e. it was catering for certain standards in public service broadcasting which seemed to carry greater value to the corporation than mere audience levels.

As Radio Luxembourg represented the sole radio threat, it would seem logical that other commercial interests would once again strive to capitalise on the market potential. It was precisely this environment which would prove to be the fertile ground from which a new vigorous radio model would emerge. It was to be called Pirate Radio and the term was used to denote a form of broadcasting 'contravening licensing regulations either within the country or origin, or reception or both' (Street 2006, p206). Chignell (2009, p137) suggests the term is mainly associated with the 'historically specific case of offshore radio in Britain in the 1960s' and indeed it is these broadcasts from vessels located off the coast of mainland UK which typify the primary characteristics of pirate radio, namely its illegality and its DJ-led popular music output.

The BBC had been aware of illegal broadcasts for some time, for example by 1961 the station The Voice of Nuclear Disarmament was using the sound channel of the Crystal Palace transmitter after the latter had closed down each evening.[98] Only a couple of years later such broadcasts were coming from ships at sea and bombarding the mainland with pop music. The BBC noted in October 1964 a new station Radio Albatross had been launched by Lincolnshire businessman Mr Robert Tidswell and was broadcasting

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[96] BBC Audience Research Report, February 1954. BBC WAC: 970, Luxembourg 1937-1954.
[97] ibid.
[98] Illegal Transmitter. BBC memo from Head of Engineering, 27 November 1961. BBC WAC: TI6/411.

to Yorkshire and Lincolnshire from a ship anchored in the Wash.[99] Also in December 1964, the BBC's Sound Broadcasting Committee was informed that an unidentified station had been heard on 267 metres coming from the Thames estuary transmitting a good signal across London.[100] But it was earlier that year on 29 March 1964 that, what would become one of the most successful pirate stations began broadcasting, when Radio Caroline made its first broadcast from international waters five miles off Harwich (Donovan 1991, p216). There followed an explosion of stations which changed the course of youth music radio culture in Britain by introducing a veritable smorgasbord of constant, American style, DJ-fronted, pop music radio of a style unheard of in the UK and flying in the face of the BBC's continued post-war policy.

Sterling (2004, p381) identifies four elements which were critical in the development of British pirate stations; firstly, it was a reaction to the continued monopoly of domestic British radio by the BBC; secondly, the territorial jurisdiction of Britain at the time was defined as ending three miles offshore which made broadcasting from sea feasible; thirdly, there was an ongoing struggle in British broadcasting between the elitists and the popularisers with the BBC seen as bastion of the former, and fourthly, the unique social climate of the 1950s, with younger people's reaction to austerity centred around music. It is certainly true pirate radio set out to exploit what it considered to be the BBC's lack of enterprise in the broadcasting of pop music. It was also critical of Radio Luxembourg for its dependence on the big record companies, who, when they plugged their own records, paid for the airtime they took over (Briggs 1995, vol 5, p507). Part of the appeal of the pirates was that they were deemed rebellious and this appealed to the young rebels of the 1960s (Boyd 1986). Another factor which Sterling fails to mention was that changes in technology helped drive access to the pirates particularly with the arrival of the transistor, an item of technology which not only improved accessibility but also was rebellious in itself as it represented a shift from communal to personal listening, or indeed the ultimate extension of what Lacey (2013, p113) describes as the 'privatization of listening'. The combination of a new technology of radio listening along with a new platform of radio listening had the effect of inspiring a new tranche of commercial opposition to the BBC and of leaving the BBC once again attempting to play catch-up to its competitors' advances.

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[99] BBC Extract, 7 October 1964. BBC WAC: T16/411.
[100] BBC Extract, 8 December 1964. BBC WAC: T16/411.

The 'victory of the pirate stations in the early 1960s' (Shuker 2008, p142) encouraged a number of interest groups to come to the fore to lobby the government for commercial radio and the break-up of the BBC monopoly.[101] There was a feeling that the victory of the pirates had encouraged the commercialist lobby voice and that all that might be needed would be a go ahead from the Government for the BBC monopoly to be broken.[102] Still, in the early part of the 1960s, the BBC was sticking to the position it had held for the previous four decades, namely as the bastion of public service broadcasting in Britain. Director General Hugh Greene speaking to American broadcasting executives laid down the BBC's position for the new era:

> The new age of broadcasting which lies before us… should stand in the service of truth and… in the service of artistic truth as well as hard factual truth.[103]

The first significant changes the BBC made to its radio portfolio since the restructuring of 1946 came about in 1957. A working party was set up under Director of Sound Broadcasting, R.E.L Wellington, to examine the existing service and make recommendations on its future shape and policy. The report, published in January 1957[104] concluded 'the effort to improve public taste had given the public indigestion and it had turned away'. So time was ripe to modify current policy substantially. It should seek to cater for the needs and tastes of its audiences without seeking to alter and improve them as it had in the past. In particular:

> Entertainment should not be undervalued or regarded just as a stepping stone to serious things. Less attention should be placed on spoken word and more on those who look to radio for relaxation and diversion.[105]

Wellington noted the changes that had developed since 1946 on the media landscape, particularly the great strides made by television, both BBC and commercial, and cites

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[101] These included the National Broadcasting Development Committee (see Jarvis 2005) and the Local Radio Association (see Colle 1969).

[102] *The Tribune*, 5 June 1964.

[103] British Broadcasting 1922-1962, BBC Press Office, 14 November 1962.

[104] BBC Report: The Future of Sound Broadcasting in the Domestic Services, Jan 1957. BBC WAC R34/1021.

[105] ibid.

the fact that there were 14,000 combined sound and television licences issued in 1947 and 7 million issued only ten years letter.[106] Interestingly, he makes no mention of Radio Luxembourg which would have been the main radio competitor at this time, illustrating perhaps the lack of importance which the BBC attached to Radio Luxembourg and how far its position of threat had diminished since the late 1930s. Wellington also noted audiences for television had gone up, while audiences for radio had gone down and his response was to plan a re-organisation, 'less drastic than that of 1946 and one which would represent a remodelling of programmes rather than programme services'.[107] The new pattern of programmes was scheduled to begin on 29 September 1957 and would include an extended Light Programme carrying a richer choice of entertainment; a Home Service consisting of more general news, music, drama, talks, discussions and comment; a partial merger of the Light Programme and the Home Service; and the main change which was the creation of two specialised programmes using the existing Third Programme frequencies, the Third Programme itself between 8.00-11.00pm, and a new Network Three at the earlier time of 6.00-8.00pm.[108] Network Three[109] would accommodate a number of spoken word programmes that would be displaced from the Home and the Light.

The next major analysis of BBC radio came in 1964 when the new Director of Sound Broadcasting, Frank Gillard, argued that 'if television was to throttle radio then sound broadcasting would be dead by now' but instead it was still thriving in his opinion (Gillard 1964). Gillard chose his research carefully claiming figures showed only 4% of the population declared they did not listen to the radio at all or had no radio sets, and estimating that over the previous six years, the average daily radio audience had actually been rising steadily, up to 28 million people listening at some point every day and that they were using their radios for 2.5 hours every day, thus he was able to conclude more people were in effect listening and listening for longer. Gillard's bright picture also estimated that in 1964 radio's average daily audience was only one fifth below that of television and that 2.5 million new radio receivers were sold in Britain in 1962. Gillard did acknowledge that there were some countries where radio was becoming extinct or becoming no more than an amplified jukebox (in a nod to the

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[106] ibid.

[107] ibid.

[108] The BBC's Plans for Sound Broadcasting. R.E.L. Wellington (BBC Director of Sound Broadcasting). Manchester Guardian, 28 August 1957.

[109] For more on Network Three see Carpenter (1996, p181).

pirates) but the thrust of Gillard's argument was that radio was certainly changing and that there was an increasing readiness in the audience to try listening to new and avant-garde works of music, literature and drama and that 'BBC radio should give a lead in these things' (Gillard ibid). It is odd that Gillard does not mention pop music here when it was exactly this format which was impacting on the BBC. Equally, in talking of competition he describes it in the form of 'television services, record players, tape recorders, home movies' and so on without any mention of the pirates nor the bodies calling for commercial radio in the UK which suggests, like the BBC's attitude to Radio Luxembourg, the idea of radio competition seemed unimportant. Gillard goes on to outline his plans for radio which include the introduction of an additional service over large parts of Britain, as recommended in the Pilkington Report.[110] He also sought to extend the Light Programme and the Third Programme and aimed to improve the music service but with the caveat that this would not be 'the thin edge of a wedge leading to a gramophone record takeover' (Gillard ibid).

The BBC's position with regard to commercial competition in the 1950s was bolstered by the Beveridge Report.[111] As Taylor (1953, p357) notes the Beveridge Committee concluded that one fundamental objection condemned commercial radio:

> The commentator, news reporter, entertainer etc ceases to be doing
> the job for his own sake. His purpose is not to inform or educate but
> to gather an audience for a sales talk… The case against commercial radio
> sponsoring is so overwhelming that it is difficult to see how anyone could
> support a proposal for commercial radio.

However by May 1964 the BBC noted that Radio Caroline programmes consisted of a repetition of top ten pops and the interest among teenagers gave rise to some concern particularly as legislation to stop the broadcasts could not be expected for some time.[112] Only one month later in June 1964, the idea of a BBC popular music service is first mooted. Postmaster General Reginald Bevins revealed to the House of Commons he had discussed the project with the BBC. To go ahead however the corporation would need permission to broadcast more records and it had not been successful in securing

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[110] This would lead to the launch of BBC Local Radio in 1967.
[111] Report of the Broadcasting Committee 1949 (Beveridge Report), Cmd 8116, London HMSO.
[112] BBC Extract, 12 May 1964. BBC WAC: T16/411.

this so far due to needletime[113] restrictions.[114] At the same time the BBC had begun pressing Bevins for authority to set up local stations.[115] Deriding the commercial sector's non-stop pop music and advertisements, the BBC wanted to offer a community service which would be educational as well as providing light entertainment and pop music. The reaction of the commercial pressure groups to this was that they could provide the same but there was an actual public demand for non-stop pop music rather than some hybrid offering as proposed by the BBC.[116]

The pirates were eventually closed down as a result of the Marine etc Broadcasting (Offences) Act 1967 although it is a mistake to conclude this marked the end of pirate radio in Britain, on the contrary, it 'continues to the present day' (Street 2006, p204) but the movement created by the activism of the offshore stations made change inevitable and within two weeks of the pirates coming off air some of the presenters were broadcasting again on the BBC on Radio 1 (Boyd 1986) as the BBC finally launched a service of pop music aimed at a youth audience and in a single fell swoop regained its radio monopoly thanks again to legislation - much as it had done in 1939.

Conclusion

A number of characteristics define this period under discussion in terms of the position of the BBC and the state of the UK radio industry. An important point is the fact the BBC was born out of competing interests. The BBC emerged out of necessity through cooperation between a multitude of wireless enterprises. This cooperation between competing interests was of course initiated by the Government but the most glaring fact is that competitors came together under one umbrella, acting in the best interests of the industry at large. From this monopoly however came a broadcasting service which subsequently came under attack from home and foreign competitors keen to profit from broadcasting's comfortable relationship with advertising. By the outbreak of the Second World War, one could analyse UK radio as having gone from open experimental playing field, to cooperation necessitated by chaos of the airwaves,

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[113] A restriction created by the Musicians' Union and Phonographic Performance Limited on the amount of recorded music that could be transmitted by the BBC over a 24 hour period which continued until 1988.
[114] *Daily Mail*, 3 June 1964.
[115] The Future of Sound Broadcasting: Local Broadcasting, 25 November 1960. BBC WAC: R1/96/9.
[116] *The Sunday Times,* 31 May 1964.

to a consolidation of broadcasting in a single body followed by the emergence of a competitive radio market albeit with competitors acting outside of British jurisdiction.

Over the course of the Second World War the BBC changed into something that had little in common with the Reithian model it had been before the war and circumstances put BBC Radio at the heart of the British nation. Also, an absence of significant competition for the duration of the war gave the corporation time to address its pre-war position and make changes which would ameliorate its position in the post-war era. It is interesting to speculate how the broadcasting map of Britain would have evolved had war not broken out since it had the effect of eradicating the BBC's competitors at a stroke and bolstering its position as the sole provider of information.

The post war radio landscape saw a revitalised Radio Luxembourg and a renewed competitive pressure on the BBC from commercial sources although on this occasion aided by an important social change in the guise of the arrival of Rock 'n' Roll. This new form of popular music and the medium of radio developed a symbiotic relationship. Both thrived off each other and it was no surprise that from this pirate radio would flourish. This in turn would cause the BBC to take steps to deal with the pressure on its position and from 1967 it would make broad changes to its national and local radio presence. The BBC's competitors were characterised by an overwhelming confidence, whether based on the entrepreneurial spirit of Radio Normandy, the insouciance of Radio Luxembourg or the sheer bravado of the pirates. They were also shaping the BBC's own radio policy direction and all just ahead of a new form of emergent competition namely, legalised commercial radio.

Chapter 2

A Level Playing Field:

The BBC and Independent Radio,

1967 – 1988

This chapter examines the period from 1967 to 1988, just over two decades which heralded a number of changes which would radically alter the UK's radio landscape. These changes are characterised by a number of factors which would become more prominent in future models of broadcasting. They include; a wider and more focussed listening experience, the emergence of narrowcasting as a template and increased localism.

For the BBC the period begins with a re-ordering and re-branding of its existing national radio portfolio, leading to more targeted programming and the provision of services to deliver this content. The period also sees the introduction of a local radio service delivered at the micro level thus marking a new direction from the macro level, a trend which would continue to dominate radio for the next number of years.

Following the demise of the pirates in the latter part of the 1960s and hence lack of any real competitive rival to the BBC, renewed calls for a form of commercial radio did not fall on deaf ears. In fact, now was the time for commercial competition to gain a foothold in the UK radio market and in a wholly legalised form. The form that this new commercial rival took was unique to the UK and indeed led to the model being referred to as *independent* radio rather than *commercial* radio. Other competitive elements persisted of course, including the indefatigable Radio Luxembourg and a re-emergence of pirate stations toward the end of the period under consideration.

As a legitimate competitor entered the radio market, would this herald a new degree of cooperation to ensure the survival of the industry as a whole or would each party adhere to its own policy of mistrust and refusal to engage on matters of common interest? The chapter examines how the BBC coped with the new actors in the radio arena and demonstrates how these very actors themselves coped as the new arrivals within this area of the broadcasting industry. It also examines whether the introduction of legalised competition would provoke any degree of cooperation within the industry.

BBC Radio: Twin Services, National and Local

This period saw the instigation of two very important changes of direction for BBC Radio, these took place on a national level, namely to the BBC's existing radio portfolio

and also on a local level where the BBC embarked on the road of localised broadcasting for the first time. It also saw the publication of a detailed plan for network and local radio, *Broadcasting in the Seventies,*[117] which arguably became one of the most important documents ever produced by the corporation in regard to its radio services and which Briggs (1995, vol 5, pxxi) describes as 'one of the most controversial documents in BBC history'. Changes to BBC radio at this time were driven largely by competition, the experience of powerful illegal competition of the 1960s as well as a fear of imminent legalised competition which appeared inevitable and therefore required a response on both a national and local level.

(i) BBC National Radio

By the latter half of the 1960s the future of the offshore pirate stations, which had become the BBC's main radio competitor, was beginning to come to an end and in 1966 a government white paper on broadcasting[118] had given the BBC permission to open its own pop music channel. The Marine, etc, Broadcasting (Offences) Act became law on the 14 August 1967, achieving a long term government aim of 'outlawing broadcasts emanating from outside territorial boundaries' (Peters 2011) and a little over a month later on 30 September 1967, Radio 1 launched on 247 metres medium wave. Radio 1 was only one in a new package of radio offerings from the BBC which now came into effect. In reality, Radio 1 was the only actual new station in this package and it was specifically created to offer a popular music service and crucially, to offer such a service tailored to match the tone and energy that had been the successful attributes of the now defunct pirate stations, as Hendy (2007, p14) notes it was created by 'the exigencies of pop'.

The Light Programme was now renamed Radio 2, offering middle-of-the-road pop and rock music as well as folk, country, jazz, big-band music and light classics along with comedy and sport. Initially Radio 1 and Radio 2 simulcast programming during many periods of the day. From 1970 however the stations began to develop separate identities for different audiences, Radio 1 targeting the youth culture audience in popular music

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[117] Broadcasting in the Seventies: The BBC Plan for Network Radio and Non-Metropolitan Broadcasting, BBC Publications, 1969.
[118] Broadcasting Policy; White Paper, 2 August 1966. C.(66) 125.

while Radio 2 tried to keep step with the musical tastes of people in their forties and fifties (Sterling 2004, p346). Roger Scott, who was Controller of Radio 1 and Radio 2 when both stations launched, admitted to being unsure at the time as to what actually constituted 'pop music' in order to differentiate between the two stations. It was not defined in the government white paper of 1966[119] but was essentially left for the BBC to define. Scott's solution was to decide it would be different to what he himself described as 'sweet music', an umbrella term for most of the music offered on the Light Programme (Scott 1967). Given the opportunity to establish its own pop music network as a 'reward by the Wilson government' (Hendy 2007, p14) it would appear that the BBC was still unsure about the formula that had made the pirates so successful.

The Third Programme, established as the main cultural station offering classical music, drama and talks and experimental programmes, was named Radio 3. To be more precise the *Third Network,* the umbrella title for the Music Programme, the *Third* and the various sport and education programmes that shared the frequencies with them, became Radio 3 (Carpenter 1996, p247) although the new channel would have a narrower remit. In fact the wrangling over exactly what would be broadcast on Radio 3 and what sections of its content might shift to Radio 4, continued up until 4 April 1970 when the new Radio 3 network plans came into effect, namely a 'mainly classical music repertoire with some contemporary music and drama' (Carpenter ibid, p257).

The Home Service had been the home of spoken word programmes including news and current affairs, discussion, drama and features. On becoming Radio 4 it was to retain its familiar range of programming and indeed for a while found it difficult to shake off its old name which survived for a year or more in the form of the on air announcement; 'This is Radio 4, the Home Service' (Hendy 2007, p13). In its transition from the Home Service, Radio 4 was the network that underwent the least change in its output, many of the old programmes remained the same as Hendy (ibid p15) notes:

> The sheer range and mix of programmes was impressive. But it was a menu barely distinguishable from that published a week before under the Home Service moniker – barely distinguishable, indeed, from anything printed in the *Radio Times* a decade or more before.

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[119] ibid.

By 1970 however, Radio 4 had begun to shape its own identity, transforming from its old Home Service style of mixed speech and music to a 'wholly speech oriented station' (Elmes 2007, p16) where journalism would be allowed to bloom and current affairs would have a more important central role alongside the existing drama, comedy, science and arts output coverage, so for example programmes such as *The World Tonight, PM* and *Start The Week* all began in this year.

Briggs (1995, vol 5, p577) claims that apart from Radio 1, which really was completely new, 'bigger changes had already taken place in BBC radio in the years between 1964 and 1967 than took place in 1967 itself.' This may be true in the sense that the Light Programme had begun its battle with the pirates by introducing popular music programming leading to its description as a 'youth club of the airwaves' (Chapman 1992, p1) and with the introduction of the Music Programme as part of the Network Three (Carpenter 1996, p222) but it fails to recognise that the changes resulting from the restructuring of 1967 had far greater implications for the future of radio in the BBC. There is no doubt the reorganisation of BBC radio services in 1967 was driven primarily by the hunger for pop music amongst the next generation of the BBC's potential audience. It could be argued that this drive was spurred on by a fear on two fronts; the fear of losing that audience and the fear of that audience being captured by any potential competitor. The pirates had been removed from the broadcasting arena but they could always reappear or competition in another format could also emerge. The changes of 1967 illustrated a new direction for radio and a new strategy process largely inspired by the threat of competition:

> The attention being given to Radio 1 at the end of September 1967
> spoke of a new dawn in British broadcasting. The role of radio within
> the BBC's range of services seemed to be changing in fundamental ways,
> and the corporation's historic commitment to speech radio suddenly looked
> vulnerable (Hendy 2007, p14).

The rearrangement of the BBC's national services did not just mark a more important position for popular music, it also revealed a new dimension to programming. The previous model of networks delivering a wide range of content was now abandoned in favour of more niche, audience focused content, as the Managing Director of BBC Radio, Ian Trethowan (1970, p6) noted:

The basic change in radio is that mixed programming no longer applies, listeners seek the convenience of predictable networks.

As well as a more prominent role for pop music and a greater desire to appeal to the youth section of the audience, the changes to national radio demonstrated a new commitment to *narrowcasting* namely the targeting of specific content to specific audience sectors, a trend which prevails to the present day for most radio broadcasters.

(ii) BBC Local Radio

An interesting phenomenon to rear its head in the 1960s was that of local radio and it was one which was to assume a central role in the broadcasting policies of the latter half of the decade. Notions of local radio broadcasting suggested it implied a 'localised provision of news, music and crucially, democracy' (Wright 1982), so not based on the simple music formats of the pirates, although its perceived role as a bulwark to the threat of the pirates was certainly also an important consideration. The idea of local radio was initially considered at governmental level in a White Paper in 1962[120] and subsequently in a second White Paper later in the same year.[121] In December 1966 the Labour government announced its decision to go ahead with local radio in another White Paper, the same White Paper that authorized the BBC to begin a new pop music network.[122] However, as far as local broadcasting was concerned it was deemed only a partial victory, with local radio to be launched on an experimental basis and run as a joint operation by the BBC and local authorities.[123] The experiment began on 8 November 1967 with the opening of Radio Leicester with Radios Sheffield, Merseyside, Nottingham, Brighton, Stoke on Trent, Leeds and Durham following next in line.

The development of local radio in Britain was expected to be more than simply a copy of what the pirates had been doing or of what was apparent in the successful American

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[120] Broadcasting Policy; White Paper, July 1962. Cmd 1770.
[121] Broadcasting Policy; White Paper, 13 November 1962. C.(62) 181.
[122] Broadcasting Policy; White Paper, 20 December 1966. Cmd 3169.
[123] White Paper Christmas, *The Spectator,* 23 December 1966.

model as extolled by Frank Gillard[124] following a trip to the USA in 1954 where he celebrated its ability to speak to listeners as a 'familiar friend and neighbour.'[125] It was thought local radio must have significant and positive effects on local political communication and one of the key driving forces at governmental level was the need to promote greater public interest and participation in the system of local government. The White Paper of 1966[126] had identified this as a central part of the raison d'etre of the proposed new system of local sound broadcasting which was charged with 'fostering a greater public awareness of local affairs and involvement in the community' (Wright 1982). In fact local broadcasting was seen as a crucial component to social integration theories of the period (Powell 1965).

As well as considering the future of its national services, the BBC was at the forefront of the emerging local radio vanguard, in fact Briggs (1995, vol 5, p619) argues the main thrust for it came from inside the BBC. He mentions Gillard as a leading advocate of local radio within the BBC and cites his document from 1955; *An Extension of Regional Broadcasting,*[127] as the first BBC internal document proposing regional expansion but stopping just short of vaunting a local radio system largely on the grounds of cost. The BBC did put a proposal to the Pilkington Committee in February 1961 for around eighty local stations which they could deliver but with the warning that any competition from commercial stations in this field would lead to problems of increased cost for the corporation. The main envisaged danger however was that commercial local broadcasting would be networked and blanket commercial sound broadcasting would come in sneakily through the back door.[128]

The commercial sector was quick to jump on the local radio bandwagon too. By autumn 1960 over one hundred commercial radio companies, mostly backed by local press, had been formed in anticipation of a new committee on broadcasting which might 'favour the local dimension' (Briggs ibid, p629). The BBC was quite fearful of this happening and had identified its possible impact, believing it would be lucky to retain just over one third of the total available audience for radio if local commercial companies were

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[124] BBC Director of Radio 1964-1969.

[125] Radio in the USA: A Visitor's View, Frank Gillard, 6 July 1954. BBC WAC: E15/75.

[126] Broadcasting Policy; White Paper, 20 December 1966. Cmd 3169.

[127] An Extension of Regional Broadcasting, 28 February 1955. BBC WAC: R34/731/5.

[128] Report of the Committee on Broadcasting: Memoranda Submitted to the Committee, Vol 1: The Future of Sound Broadcasting: Local Broadcasting. Cmnd 1819 (1962).

allowed to go ahead.[129] Commercial pressure continued with larger forces such as Pye, the radio manufacturing company, joining the campaign.[130] The BBC's reaction was to rely on its old method of castigating the commercial companies by addressing the type of programming they would offer and how the BBC's would be more virtuous, speaking in December 1963 Gillard reflected:

> BBC stations would be more than mere juke-boxes but instead would have programmes reflecting current affairs and local interests, issues and cares.[131]

A BBC statement claimed the aim of its local stations would be to help build a vigorous and satisfying local life with a wide progressive outlook, essentially suggesting the BBC would be best at serving local communities:

> The BBC believes that what broadcasting has done for the national community over the years, it could also do for the local community… BBC local stations would devote themselves to local issues and interests, to provide a service which would effectively enlarge the range of broadcasting in Britain and meet a genuine need in each modern community. Everything of real concern in community life would be reflected and covered in the programmes.[132]

Indeed it was no surprise to the BBC when the Postmaster General John Stonehouse wrote to BBC Chairman Lord Hill in August 1969 telling him the government now authorised 'the provision by the BBC of a general and permanent service of local radio broadly on the lines proposed by the corporation'.[133] The Postmaster General's decision resulted in the BBC being given permission to increase the number of stations from the existing eight to twenty.

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[129] BBC Marriot Committee Report on Area and Local Broadcasting, 1 September 1959. BBC WAC: R34/1585/1, Local Radio.
[130] A Plan for Local Broadcasting in Britain, Pye Telecommunications Ltd, October 1960.
[131] Interview with Frank Gillard, *Yorkshire Post*, 11 December 1963.
[132] Local Radio in the Public Interest: The BBC's Plan, February 1966, BBC Publications.
[133] Stonehouse to Hill, 13 August 1969. BBC WAC: R78/610/1.

Linfoot (2011, p185) argues that the future for BBC Local Radio by the end of the 1960s was increasingly becoming tied to party politics. The Labour government (1964-1970) was happy to secure the future of BBC local radio and increase the number of stations but with the coming to power of a Conservative government in 1970 the arrival of commercial radio was inevitable. A new White Paper in March 1971 laid out plans to create up to sixty new local commercial stations across the UK,[134] the BBC's monopoly in local broadcasting appeared to be under threat.

(iii) Broadcasting in the Seventies

It is important at this point to consider an important policy document of the time produced by the BBC namely, *Broadcasting in the Seventies*[135] which was published in 1969 and is to this day seen as a seminal document in the history of BBC Radio. As already noted Briggs (1995, vol 5, pxxi) and Abramsky (2002a) both describe it as one of the most controversial documents ever produced by BBC Radio. Upon publication it created considerable controversy largely because it developed further what Street (2006, p61) calls 'generic' broadcasting or which Chignell (2011, p92) refers to as 'format' broadcasting, namely a model which targets specific audience groups. It was a model which was pioneered by commercial stations and which the BBC felt the need to embrace and one which would go on to dominate UK radio up to the present day. In effect *Broadcasting in the Seventies* may be rightly seen as a landmark document but it should also be remembered that its driving imperative emanated from the broadcasting model constructed by the BBC's competitors.

The document begins by highlighting how the BBC has moved into new territories including Radio 1 and local radio but reveals that this has exposed a weakness in that:

> These changes, however, have been grafted piecemeal on to a tree
> planted in an earlier age of broadcasting, and we have now looked at
> the radio services as a whole, to see how they might be rationalised and

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[134] White Paper: An Alternative Service of Radio Broadcasting, 1971 (Cmd 4636).

[135] Broadcasting in the Seventies: The BBC Plan for Network Radio and Non-Metropolitan Broadcasting, BBC Publications, 1969.

reshaped to serve the audiences of the seventies.[136]

The document goes on to describe how the traditional broadcasting model based on the principle of mixed programming on a single channel is anachronistic and listeners now expect radio to be based on a different principle – 'that of the specialised network, offering a continuous stream of one particular type of programme and meeting one particular interest.'[137] So a priority would be a clearer separation between Radio 1 and Radio 2. There was also a proposal to realign Radio 3 and Radio 4. On Radio 3 the separate labels of Music Programme and Third Programme would disappear with the entire output of the network put under the single heading of Radio 3, concentrating wholly on music and the arts. The aim was also to confirm Radio 4 as a speech network, the home of factual programmes, documentaries, current affairs as well as news.[138]

As for local radio, after embracing the local radio experiment of 1967 there was now a belief that local radio was not only viable, but an integral part of any broadcasting system. This was referred to as a 'Radio 5' - a system of some forty local stations, broadcasting local news and information and a whole range of community programmes.[139] The document speaks of the need develop local radio as 'a vital part of the BBC's services' but interestingly states this is not done in an attempt to stake a claim as a sole provider of such a service by stating 'we make no claim for monopoly'[140] but is keenly aware that competition may be on the horizon at local level. This threat of local competition is nevertheless not considered to be in any way critical as the document confidently predicts that as the BBC has matched up to competition in television 'it could do so in radio'.[141]

Abramsky[142] as noted, had only recently joined the organisation, and noticed 'a narrowing of BBC Radio's ambition' as revealed in the document (Abramsky 2002a). Although in many ways visionary by creating a shape for public service radio that rendered it more audience focused and ultimately more competitive, Abramsky also concludes that the all-pervasive message from the document was one that 'radio had to

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[136] ibid p2.
[137] ibid p4.
[138] ibid p4.
[139] ibid p13.
[140] ibid p6.
[141] ibid p6.
[142] BBC Director of Radio 1999-2006, Director of Audio & Music 2006-2008.

change since we were now in a television age, the core belief was that radio still had a role in some areas but for most people radio was merely a daytime medium' (Abramsky ibid). Abramsky (ibid) claims that around this time there was a feeling that 'radio was no longer central to the future of the BBC' and indeed some insiders were even predicting its 'ultimate demise by the end of the century' (Bridson 1971, p333).

In many ways *Broadcasting in the Seventies* represented a landmark document for the BBC and Briggs offers a comprehensive exegesis, devoting an entire chapter to it (Briggs 1995, vol 5, p721). The key changes in the content of the BBC's national radio stations and the development of BBC local radio came about as a result of implementing the policy document[143] resulting in a greater coherency of programming. In a wider more theoretical context it is important for shifting the BBC's approach away from mixed programming towards generic radio broadcasting. The creation of the four networks in 1967 certainly initiated this process but it was *Broadcasting in the Seventies* which consolidated it by ensuring each network now had a unique and separate identity. In many ways one can perceive this document as the cradle of narrowcasting[144] within the BBC, namely 'the customized version of broadcasting that targets information to a specific, narrowly defined group of recipients' (Jones 2003, p337). Commercial operators had been doing this for a number of years but now it was to form a core element of BBC sound broadcasting policy and would continue to do so for the future. It is also interesting to note with the benefit of hindsight how Abramsky's fears proved unfounded and that radio was to undergo a renaissance a little over twenty years later although it is easy to see how at this point in history her argument was persuasive.

Certainly the 1970s were perceived within the BBC to be the decade of massive anticipated change. Speaking as the new dawn approached the BBC chairman, Lord Hill, was able to herald the new era for radio as one centred around further development of the specialised networks like Radio 1 and Radio 3 but also a prominent position for local radio:

> Non metropolitan broadcasting forms an essential part of our service.

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[143] The new programme schedules were introduced on 4 April 1970.

[144] Perhaps a better term for 'generic' broadcasting (Street 2006, p61) or 'format' broadcasting (Chignell 2011, p92) by virtue of the fact that the word 'broadcasting' itself is omitted.

The biggest development in radio over the next decade will be localism, we hope every major city and community will have its own radio station. The local radio experiment has been a great success (Hill 1969).

Broadcasting in the Seventies is an important document because it is the first major policy document which sets down how BBC Radio must adapt its radio services in order to deal with competition and accepts that the BBC's position may indeed succumb to a challenge from other sources. It highlights how the BBC has recognised the potential threat of past competition and, more importantly, of possible future competition but also illustrates how, by embracing the broadcasting models exemplified by competitors, the BBC has been forced to move from a Reithian notion of 'mixed programming' to one of specialised, audience focused services, if it was to compete successfully and as Chignell (2011, p95) states, the document 'left nothing to the imagination and no room at all for obsfucation' which emphasised how significant a policy change it represented. Localism and specialisation would become the major forces in the 1970s for the BBC. They would also create the level playing field upon which commercial agitators would finally get their chance to once again take on the BBC, not just at a local level but eventually also at a national level.

The Competition: A New Radio Entity

By the end of the 1960s, with the pirate stations no longer visible or audible on the radio horizon, the BBC faced virtually no actual direct radio competition from competitors with the exception of Radio Luxembourg which managed to still be 'doing well' against BBC Radio by the mid 1970s.[145] Any notion of monopoly within the BBC after the launch of the new national and local services was however to be short lived. Briggs (1995, vol 5, p638) suggests that by the late 1960s the BBC was beginning to 'reconcile itself to eventual competition' and that its radio monopoly was not secure. In reality it was a change in the political landscape which brought the idea to fruition. In its manifesto for the 1970 General Election, the Conservative Party spelt out its unambiguous plans for radio in the UK:

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[145] Douglas, T., Commercial Radio: The 19 Stations That Showed Why the Cynics Were Wrong. *Campaign Magazine*, 2 July 1976.

> We believe that people are as entitled to an alternative radio service
> as to an alternative television service. We will permit local private
> enterprise radio under the general supervision of an independent
> broadcasting authority. Local institutions, particularly local newspapers,
> will have the opportunity of a stake in local radio, which we want to see
> closely associated with the local community.[146]

On winning the election Prime Minister Edward Heath[147] set in motion these plans and the resulting piece of legislation was the Sound Broadcasting Act 1972 which established for the first time a legal position for competitors to the BBC, at the same time the Independent Television Authority (ITA) accordingly changed its name to the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) and would also act as regulator for the new tranche of sound broadcasting. The Act received Royal Assent on 12 June 1972 and on 19 June Minister for Posts and Communications, Christopher Chataway, announced the location of the first wave of 26 independent local radio (ILR) stations.

(i) Independent Local Radio (ILR)

It was clear from the 1970 Conservative Party election manifesto and the subsequent White Paper entitled *An Alternative Service of Broadcasting*[148] that the new proposed system of local commercial radio was not going to be based on a free market model but rather one which espoused public service attributes catering for local news and information needs and thus not at all similar to the previously successful pirate model. Amongst the proponents of commercial radio in the UK many shared this stance. The Local Radio Association, which had been campaigning for many years, had refined its own position in a document it published in 1970 called *The Shape of Local Radio*[149] although not everyone shared this new analysis. As Stoller (2010, p29) points out, another promoter of commercial radio, Hughie Green, was 'vocal in his opposition.' So we begin to see early divisions set in amongst commercial radio champions who, on learning their hopes may become reality, begin to fragment.

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[146] 1970 Conservative Party General Election Manifesto.

[147] In office 1970-1974.

[148] White Paper: An Alternative Service of Radio Broadcasting, 29 March 1971 (Cmnd 4636).

[149] *The Economist,* 10 October 1970.

The White Paper proposed the continuation of the BBC largely unchanged with the provision by the BBC of 20 local radio stations although now funded by the licence fee. The IBA was to provide advertising supported local radio from up to 60 stations and any uncertainties regarding their relationship with the BBC were laid to rest with an explicit reference to the newly named ILR stations competing directly with Radio 1 and Radio 2 rather than BBC local radio (Wray 2009), in effect laying down the model of competitive broadcasting which would permeate the radio industry for the decades ahead. The passing of the Sound Broadcasting Act finally gave full legal status to an opposing model of radio broadcasting to that of the BBC and just over a year later in October 1973, this model made the transition from the statute book to the studio with the launch of LBC in London.[150] LBC had won the news franchise for London and was followed a week later by Capital[151] which won the London general and entertainment franchise.[152]

LBC's objective was to provide a news station for London, as well as supplying a news service for the new commercial stations, known as Independent Radio News (IRN) (Machin and Niblock 2006, p54). LBC did not start well, failing to 'attract anything like enough advertising' (Stoller 2010, p55) which was the primary source of income for the new stations. In these early years LBC hastily went through a number of changes to its programming and staffing in an attempt to stem losses and find the programming and scheduling formula that would increase audience figures and therefore boost advertising revenue. On a number of occasions chief executive Bill Hutton envisaged the only way out of financial disaster was to rely on regular complete overhauls of resources and output, what were in effect rescue plans.[153]

Capital Radio perhaps had an easier start simply because of its content i.e. a daytime mix of popular music and speech, something that was to characterise all other ILR stations and this is why Stoller (ibid) correctly suggests that Capital's start date, 16 October 1973, was arguably 'the real start of ILR in the UK' as this was the model that would prevail for future stations. Although he goes on to say that despite Capital's

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[150] The London Broadcasting Company (LBC) began broadcasting on 8 October 1973.
[151] Capital Radio began broadcasting on 16 October 1973.
[152] The first five franchises were for London News (LBC 8 October 1973), London General (Capital Radio 16 October 1973), Glasgow (Radio Clyde 31 December 1973), Birmingham (BMRB 19 February 1974) and Manchester (Piccadilly Radio 2 April 1974).
[153] Rescue plan for LBC to be put to staff. *Financial Times*, 23 January 1974

relative success compared to LBC, it would be Radio Clyde in Glasgow which would set the standard for success when it began on 31 December 1973, offering 'high grade, popular radio, mixing a skilfully chosen selection of music with ambitious news and features programmes and programming' (Stoller ibid, p60). Certainly for the two London stations spearheading commercial radio in the UK it was not an easy launch. As well as the challenge of securing advertisers, both stations received poor press reaction. While Radio 2 may have been seen as Capital's natural competitor and possibly Radio 4 LBC's, competitive tensions between LBC and Capital themselves were a feature of the weeks and months following launch. In London the presence of two new radio stations meant they were competing with each other for audience and revenue and found themselves both party to common disputes over the coverage of various events in the capital.[154] For the new ILR stations the competitor was not just BBC local and national radio but equally other ILR stations. In order to convert this division into cooperation the first five companies met in March 1973 and formed the Association of Independent Radio Contractors (AIRC) to handle issues where 'joint work was desirable' (Stoller ibid, p62) thus marking an attempt to foster better relations among ILR stations and particularly in their joint struggle against the BBC.

Stoller (ibid, p68) claims 1974-1976 were the pioneer years of independent radio. Stations had been bonding with larger audiences and by early 1975 there were nine stations broadcasting.[155] An air of arrogant confidence was detectable among the ILR stations, the managing director of BRMB, David Pinnell, speaking in 1974 insisted:

> We are putting up a good fight against strong competition particularly
> from Radio 1 and Radio Luxembourg, but as far as community
> broadcasting is concerned we are way ahead of BBC local radio here.[156]

Even by 1976 however, the ILR stations still felt they were facing an uphill struggle. With the London stations still 'floundering against the BBC' (Hendy 2007, p139), Capital re-thought its music policy, offering more pop music and less talk, for which it was criticised by the IBA but Capital claimed it was necessary in order to boost

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[154] Stoller (2010, p56) cites the tensions over the wedding of Princess Anne and Mark Phillips on 14 November 1973 which required intervention by the IBA.
[155] LBC, Capital Radio, Radio Clyde, BRMB, Piccadilly Radio, Metro Radio (Newcastle), Swansea Sound (Swansea), Radio Hallam (Sheffield), Radio City (Liverpool) and Radio Forth (Edinburgh).
[156] *Ad Week*, 12 July 1974.

audience appeal and therefore advertising revenue and it was a move that paid dividends so that by the middle of 1977 Capital had caught up with Radio 1 with audience figures showing only a fraction of a point separating the two after Capital had increased its audience by 100,000 in just six months.[157] Only one year later Capital had finally managed to topple the BBC by taking over the mantle of the most popular radio station in London.[158] Naturally the BBC fought back by re-focussing Radio 1 even more on the music charts which did affect Capital in the short-term but the London station in turn re-invented itself by eschewing teenage music trends such as punk and honing in more on chart music,[159] the staple of those who were going to buy the products which companies were willing to pay to promote on air and the results were apparent:

> Commercial radio is now enjoying its first real boom in both audiences
> and revenue since it started two and a half years ago… Many of the ILRs
> are the most popular stations in their area, beating Radio 1 and Radio 2.
> The turning point for commercial radio was Autumn 1975 when advertising
> picked up.[160]

Indeed by 1982 Capital had recovered its audience figures and also become recognised as Britain's richest radio station.[161]

The 1970s closed on a good commercial note for ILR stations with many now trading profitably. A cloud on the horizon came in the form of the Annan Report 1977[162] which although mostly concerning television, introduced potential conflicts from that medium in the shape of Channel 4 and Breakfast TV. We can also witness at this time an emergent degree of co-operation between the BBC and the ILR stations. The Home Office set up a Local Radio Working Party (LRWP) in wake of the Callaghan government's white paper of 1978[163] and it was at this point where the IBA and BBC Radio engaged with each other albeit on both competitive and co-operative levels. The

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[157] *Evening Standard,* 7 July 1977.
[158] *Evening Standard,* 29 June 1978.
[159] It is important to remember that at this time Capital was also offering drama and classical music content which was competing successfully with Radio 3 and Radio 4 (Seaton 2015, p97).
[160] Commercial Radio: the 19 stations that showed why the cynics were wrong. *Campaign magazine,* 2 July 1976.
[161] *Financial Weekly*, 13 August 1982.
[162] Annan Report on the Future of Broadcasting, 24 February 1977 (Cmnd 6753).
[163] White Paper on the Future of Broadcasting, July 1978 (PREM 16/1525).

LRWP discussed matters such as future frequency allocations and particularly the future of local radio for both the BBC and IBA and produced a series of three reports which Linfoot (2011) argues 'effectively set the pattern for the immediate growth of local radio'. Linfoot (ibid) cites an interview with Michael Barton[164] where the latter claims the workings of the LRWP 'witnessed a period of much closer relations between the BBC and the IBA' and it represents the first real 'forum and means by which the BBC and the IBA could agree frequency allocation for the next wave of local stations' (Linfoot ibid). Once this issue was settled, the LRWP became redundant and a period of closer relations came to an end. The degree of cooperation exposed by the workings of the LRWP may represent a subtle change of direction, particularly for the BBC but it should be tempered by Barton's observation only a few years before when he was able to find comfort in the knowledge that:

> Commercial radio has given us an added stimulus to the job we are
> doing; but we believe… that we have different roles to play.[165]

The challenge for the ILR stations had always been to position themselves between the opposing forces of public service broadcasting and market forces, all while under the constant regulatory gaze of the IBA. Steps taken by Capital and other stations to reconcile local output and distinctive content with the desperate need to promote pop music programming in order to attract both audience and advertisers were proving successful. This was the point at which it is possible to identify the start of the move across the rubicon 'as independent radio began to aspire once more to be commercial radio' (Stoller 2010, p123).

(ii) 'Independent' v 'Commercial'

The distinction between 'independent' radio and 'commercial' radio requires analysis at this point as it is important to understand how such a peculiar hybrid model emerged. Commercially funded radio established in 1973 and regulated by the IBA is referred to

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[164] Controller BBC Local Radio 1976-1988.
[165] BBC Radio in the Community. Michael Barton. BBC Lunchtime Lectures, 11th Series, 26 October 1976.

both in formal documentation and academic appraisals[166] as 'Independent Local Radio' (ILR), certainly up until 1990 when the term 'commercial' became the norm. IBA regulations bound franchise bidders to a strong public service remit encouraging 'programmes of merit' including education, religion, meaningful speech and a range of music. This was combined with draconian curtailment of their commercial activities and strict monitoring[167] all of which bore little resemblance to the previous forms of commercial activity of the 1930s or 1960s. The BBC had by this stage long shaken off its own traditional Reithian restraints and no evidence of 'Reithianism' - by which I mean a strict adherence to prescriptive regulation based on safeguarding perceived standards - had been evident in the activities of the BBC's competitors up until this point. So it was an interesting and surprising philosophy to regain currency in the new independent radio model. Street (2002, p118) believes it was not lost on those who tuned in how conservative the output of the new ILR stations was:

> It was to be one of the ironies of the arrival of land based commercial
> radio in Britain that over-regulation diluted the character of this new
> 'voice', far from free-style mavericks who had fought so hard in the 1930s
> and 1960s for this moment, the first era of ILR was a curiously Reithian affair.

The Conservative government which came to power at the 1970 general election, confounding opinion polls (Cook and Stevenson 2014, p178), may not have fully considered the intricacies of its pledge to introduce commercial radio and instead delivered something which eschewed full blown commercialism and was cast in a detailed set of statutory regulations. Stoller (2010, p2) says this model which fused notions of private radio funded by advertising but delivering public service output was peculiar to the UK but this ignores a similar model for radio and television employed by the Irish national broadcaster, RTE, which applied a similar framework to its radio and television strategies (Corcoran 2004). Wall (2000) suggests this notion of 'independence' as given in the government white paper on broadcasting of 1971 was not necessarily used as a foil to commercialism but was instead designed to allow the new sector to be presented as:

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[166] Stoller (2010) for example uses the term 'independent' radio in his history of the model of radio which emerged in the UK in the early 1970s.
[167] Notes on Independent Local Radio. IBA, 12 July 1972 (cited in Stoller 2010, p42).

independent from the BBC's public corporate status, *independent* from the BBC's programming monopoly and London-centric organisation, *independent* from the commercial pressures of media conglomerates like those in North America and *independent* from the influence of US-originated popular culture.

Certainly the eventual form of commercial radio which was introduced was largely unfamiliar to the accepted model of commercial radio with its core characteristic of 'homogenous programming centred around pop music' (Shelley and Winck 1995, p117). 'Independent' was evidently the key word as opposed to 'commercial' and it was this distinction, together with the responsibility of stations to answer to audiences rather than shareholders, that led to the crises of survival in the first few years of the ILR stations' existence (Briggs 1995, vol 5, p4). Even the BBC had to be careful when using the terms 'independent' and 'commercial' interchangeably as Director General Ian Trethowan informed a meeting of the Board of Governors that IBA Chairman, Lady Plowden, had remonstrated with the BBC regarding the word 'commercial' claiming that it offended the IBA to be described in terms that implied they were not engaged with public service broadcasting[168] and it is important to remember that the new stations founded from the Sound Broadcasting Act 1972 were clearly 'characterized by a public service broadcasting ethos' (McCain and Lowe 1990) and until the late 1980s ILR stations had to 'make public service programmes in order to secure their licences to broadcast in a regulated system' (Seaton 2015, p96).

As a point of semantics it is easy to define the difference in the terms 'independent' radio and 'commercial' radio as they represent two quite distinct models of radio broadcasting. In terms of popular culture both terms were used interchangeably to describe that model of sound broadcasting emanating from a body which was not the BBC. At an academic level however it is important to adhere to a distinction between the two which then begs the question; where is the precise point when one becomes the other? Certainly the 'independent' model prevailed in the 1970s but the emergence of the 'commercial' model can be traced back to the 1984 Heathrow Conference.

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[168] Board of Governors meeting minutes, 7 September 1978. BBC WAC: Commercial Radio General R92/301/1.

(iii) Heathrow Conference 1984

The expansion in the number of ILR stations following the Broadcasting Act 1982 meant that by the tenth anniversary of independent radio in the UK in October 1983, there were 38 stations on air across the country but the rules under which they operated remained exactly the same despite the fact that the core policy of the Thatcher government seemed to promote commercial freedom and 'free market' economics (Evans 2013, Seldon and Collings 2013). This did not seem to apply to the UK radio sector and those at the helm thought this was precisely the sort of environment which could make them ultimately more profitable. As Wray (2010) notes:

> Frustration and concern over the restricted business model was mounting; the desire to create radio for segmented audiences to increase revenue and ratings was becoming more urgent… yet at this point the sound of Independent Local Radio had changed little.

It was the chairmen of the original 19 companies who took the first initiative early in 1984, forming themselves into a potential lobbying group in order to liberate the independent radio sector from the shackles of intervention which it believed was impeding its commercial development potential. It was agreed by the chairmen and by the AIRC council to convene a special meeting to lay out their grievances and demands which they would then take to both the IBA and the government. That meeting took place on 23 June 1984 at the Sheraton Skyline Hotel and became known as the Heathrow Conference.[169] Stoller (2010, p153) claims the impact of the Heathrow Conference was threefold:

> It focussed the strain and worries of the ILR companies on a challenge to the fundamental conception of ILR as *independent* rather than *commercial* radio… it brought ILR as an industry into direct contact with the government for the first time… it changed the relationship between the companies and their regulator.

Street (2002, p125) describes the conference as a 'Council of War' and this an apt description. The ILR chairmen were unhappy with the restrictions placed upon them

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[169] Stoller (2010) and Wray (2009) give more detailed insights into the Heathrow Conference.

and were going to challenge not only the IBA but also the government. From the conference came four key resolutions which formed their 'Council of War' strategy:

1. Make public the industry's frustration at IBA over-regulation.
2. Demand an early, substantial cut in rentals.
3. Press the government for new legislation on commercial radio.
4. Commission an independent report on the potential for creating more stations.[170]

The achievements of the Heathrow Conference would have long term consequences for the independent sector and was even crucial to the survival of the industry. Stoller (2010, p4) does not underestimate its significance when he says this was the point where the independent radio industry 'broke with its regulated past and began to drive towards a commercial future' and Wray (2009) similarly concludes it changed 'the nature of commercial radio regulation and brought a new confidence to the people within it'. In the history of commercial radio in the UK the Heathrow Conference marks the first step towards a future which would be truly commercial and fully enshrined by the 1990 Broadcasting Act. It also highlighted how cooperation among actors within the commercial radio led to a much improved standing for the sector and arguably for the benefit of the entire radio industry as well as heralding the end of competition with the BBC within the confines of a strict public service remit.

The BBC Reaction: Emphasis on Local

For BBC Radio the main concerns which prevailed throughout the 1970s and 1980s centred around what might happen to its own radio portfolio and how the ILR stations might impact on it. Even after its launch and early success, the future of Radio 1 remained uncertain and there were fears that it was this station by its very nature which might be snatched from the BBC and moved to the commercial sector. But in January 1971 this fear was alleviated when the Minister for Posts and Telecommunications, Christopher Chataway, announced that Radio 1 and the local BBC stations would

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[170] These four key points are a summarised version of the six resolutions passed at Heathrow, see Appendix 1.

remain firmly within the BBC and that ILR would have an entirely separate existence.[171]

As for the arrival of a new and eager element of competition in the UK radio industry, the BBC did not seem unduly perturbed. The BBC Handbook 1975[172] laments the ending of the BBC's monopoly in radio with the arrival of the first ILR stations but concludes that BBC Radio's own audience figures seemed to be unaffected by this and boasts that at the end of the year under review more people were listening to BBC Radio than at the end of the previous year. The BBC Handbook for the following year, 1976,[173] admits a marked increase in public interest for ILR but also claims despite this the audience for the BBC local stations rose sharply citing a statistic which showed that in last quarter of 1974 over 1,800,000 people on average listened to BBC local radio each day, an increase of 50% on the previous year. The Controller of Radio 1 and Radio 2, Douglas Muggeridge, felt able to report on the approach of the first anniversary of commercial radio that the BBC had experienced:

> no loss of audience, if anything our figures are running slightly higher
> than last year. The large audiences quoted by the commercial stations bear
> no relation to our figures.[174]

Of course the commercial stations completely disagreed with Muggeridge and claimed his figures were not based on accurate research methods.[175]

Unsurprisingly the BBC and the commercial sector set off on a path of overt competition without any desire on either side to seek rapprochement never mind any minor degree of cooperation during the first few years of their dual existence. As it had done with the IBC back in the 1930s, the BBC was constantly watching the plans and activities of the new commercial stations by asking local staff to keep their ears to the ground.[176] It also became worried when it thought the ILR stations began to act in

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[171] *The Listener*, 11 February 1971.

[172] Incorporating the Annual Report and Accounts for 1973-74.

[173] Incorporating the Annual Report and Accounts for 1974-75.

[174] BBC Press Release, 24 Sept 1974.

[175] Audience Research, Commercial Radio. BBC WAC: R78/3, 861/1.

[176] Memo from David Lloyd James to Network Controllers, 28 May 1974. BBC WAC: Commercial Radio General, R92/301/1.

concert in order to gain publicity for them as a group in an attempt to compete head on with the BBC:

> Papers report several commercial radio stations would be broadcasting the last book of the Pallisers[177] on the night BBC TV should have been showing it. LBC took a half page advert in Evening News to announce it. This is a big publicity coup for commercial stations.[178]

Any publicity for the ILRs was bad enough but when it came from inside the BBC itself then recriminations were not far behind as when a BBC Radio 4 programme *Midweek* included a discussion from the studio of the Edinburgh commercial station, Radio Forth in May 1975. Alasdair Milne[179] thought:

> the promotion of Radio Forth odd to put it mildly. I have made enquiries… I do however regret that Radio Forth should have gained such free publicity from us.[180]

The commercial stations were not afraid to stand up to the BBC and certainly fought their corner largely due to an unabated self -belief and a strong desire to compete with the BBC, this was after all the culmination of decades of challenge to the superiority of what the BBC's rivals believed to be the former's monolithic monopoly. Simply because the BBC had been around for a very long time did not imply that only it had the wherewithal to provide exceptional programming and this was particularly felt at LBC where its editor proclaimed:

> The BBC has no divine right to expect an audience for its news simply because of its reputation for accuracy and balance built up over a large number of years.[181]

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[177] The Pallisers was a 1974 BBC television adaptation of Anthony Trollope's Palliser novels.
[178] Memo from Chief Publicity Officer, Radio (Michael Colley) to DPR, Recent Press Coverage, 15 July 1974. BBC WAC: Commercial Radio General, R92/301/1.
[179] A future Director General but as this point Director of Programmes, Television.
[180] Memo from Alasdair Milne (DPT) to Howard Newby (DPR). Radio Forth, 15 May 1975. BBC WAC: Commercial Radio General, R92/301/1.
[181] Marshall Stewart, Editor LBC. *Campaign Magazine*, 22 February 1974.

Chignell (2011, p139) in fact argues that the major innovations which came about in radio news broadcasting were made by commercial radio and highlights how LBC/IRN made 'a major contribution to radio journalism'.

As each new ILR station appeared on the map it confidently announced its arrival with a remark on how it hoped to impact on the BBC, so when Metro Radio launched in Newcastle Upon Tyne on 15 July 1974 it was able to state that it fully expected not just to take on BBC Radio Newcastle but actually win over the Radio 1 and Radio 4 audience in the North East.[182] Such bold confidence continued and by 1976 the IBA heralded the completion of its first phase in the development of ILR by highlighting how it had established 19 stations, bringing a company to air every 6 weeks, reaching in excess of 25 million people each week on VHF and over 30 million on medium wave with around 12 million adults now listening to ILR each week.[183] Despite persistent financial difficulties the ILR stations felt they were snapping at the heels of the BBC both locally and nationally in terms of audience figures.

In the latter part of the 1970s however we see the first signs of a cordial communication between the BBC and the commercial sector. Previous to this the relationship between the two had been quite confrontational and mistrusting with an absence of any element of reciprocity. In 1978 we see evidence of the first tentative steps towards some small degree of collaboration after the BBC Director of Radio, Aubrey Singer, met with the Director General of the IBA, Sir Brian Young. Singer suggested to Young that there may be sufficient grounds for both to meet from time to time to discuss issues such as the siting of transmitters and allocation of wavelengths for each of their local stations. Young agreed, hoping that both parties could identify some areas of common concern and perhaps from time to time opportunities might arrive for cooperation. Cooperation was a new word to appear in the vocabulary of communication between the two parties and Singer highlighted it again when he replied: 'if you think there is any opportunity for sensible cooperation then I would be delighted to discuss it with you.'[184]

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[182] Interview with Metro Radio Managing Director Bruce Lewis. *Newcastle Journal*, 11 July 1974.
[183] IBA News Release, 9 April 1976. BBC WAC: Commercial Radio General, R92/301/1.
[184] Correspondence between Aubrey Singer (Managing Director, BBC Radio) and Sir Brian Young (Director General, IBA), June/July 1978. BBC WAC: Commercial Radio General, R92/301/1.

Despite a semblance of nascent cooperation it was still only sentiment and had very little essence in practice particularly within the BBC. A deep mistrust of the commercial sector remained even to the point of the BBC considering changing its bank when it learned that Barclays Bank was one of the biggest spenders on radio advertising.[185] Singer himself did not seem true to his words with Young as he made clear in response to an approach from Capital Radio for BBC assistance in training independent radio staff:

> I don't think we can go with Capital Radio on this deal, simply because it allows them to get away with the impression that we are all one big industry and we are all exactly the same except they take advertising and we don't. We all know it is different to that.[186]

By 1980 a further attempt at dialogue was taking place between Singer and John Whitney, the Managing Director of Capital Radio. Both welcomed some form of dialogue on aspects of policy with Whitney pointing out that the only danger being; 'an early meeting should find itself over concerned with matters on which we would not be likely to reach agreement.'[187] Singer proposed formal participation in the areas of joint research and the exchange of information on things like union relations and the issue of sports programming.[188] A formal lunch eventually took place between leading figures in BBC Radio and leading figures from the commercial radio sector on 16 April 1980.[189] A number of key subjects were discussed but for the purposes of identifying possible cooperation, the following are important to highlight as results achieved: the possibility of joint audience research, copyright (particularly the value of acting together against Phonographic Performance Limited PPL and Performing Rights Society PRS), archives (freedom of access to BBC archives in return for payment) and future liaison (the idea

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[185] Memo from Controller Radio 2, Charles McLelland, to Managing Director Radio, 5 December 1978. BBC WAC: Commercial Radio General, R92/301/1.

[186] Memo from Aubrey Singer (Managing Director, BBC Radio) to Noble Wilson (Controller International Relations) Training Independent Radio Staff, 22 June 1979. BBC WAC: Commercial Radio General, R92/301/1.

[187] Correspondence between Aubrey Singer (Managing Director, BBC Radio) and John Whitney (Managing Director, Capital Radio) February/March 1980. BBC WAC: Commercial Radio General, R92/301/1.

[188] ibid.

[189] Those present included; BBC Managing Director Radio, BBB Deputy Managing Director Radio, BBC Chief Personnel Officer Radio, Managing Director Capital Radio, Managing Director Piccadilly Radio, Managing Director Radio City, Director Association of Independent Radio Contractors.

of a radio concordant in the form of an informal meeting between the BBC and ILR managers).[190]

Whilst relations with the commercial sector remained formal and perhaps frosty it was the BBC's relations with the government which were the most egregious. The Annan Committee reported on 24 February 1977[191] and one of its chief recommendations was the privatisation of the BBC's local radio stations. Concerned that the committee might have harsh suggestions for BBC local radio, the BBC underwent a huge analysis of its stations surveying the possibilities open to them in the years to come and which it could use a central plank of the BBC's submission to the enquiry. The subsequent report became known as the Ennals Report[192] and according to Linfoot (2011) it identified three distinct categories of proposals namely: a list of absolute priority for new stations, a list for station expansion in the present economic climate and a list of future developments. Ennals went on to suggest that existing stations had produced too much output of low quality, although also concluded in his research that a 'sizeable proportion of people living in the present local radio areas feel involved with the station and a loyalty towards it.'[193] One of Ennals' most interesting conclusions was that he felt BBC local radio should not just appeal to minorities but aim 'to reach as many listeners as possible within a certain area'[194] thus sowing the seeds of audience maximisation which had already been sown among some of those in the commercial sector. Linfoot (ibid) argues that many of Ennals' proposals were eventually watered down by the BBC but it would remain a vital template for the remainder of the decade in the next stages of local radio development.

A report on local radio[195] was produced by the BBC governors in July 1978 and was devoted to challenging the Annan recommendations and promoting the value of local radio for the BBC. The report proposes BBC intentions for its local radio arm, these include an extension of coverage with the introduction of new stations and 24 hour broadcasting. It also goes on to highlight the fact that for the BBC local broadcasting is

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[190] Note on lunch between BBC and AIRC and ILR managers, 16 April 1980. BBC WAC: Commercial Radio General, R92/301/1.
[191] The Annan Report on the Future of Broadcasting, 24 February 1977.
[192] Named after report author Maurice Ennals (Station Manager at Radio Solent).
[193] Ennals Report on Local Radio Expansion 1975. BBC WAC: R102/22.
[194] ibid
[195] Report of the Local Radio Group of Governors, 20 July 1978. BBC WAC: Local Radio Development Governors Sub-Group, R92/67/1.

entirely complementary to network radio and that the competitive position for the BBC can only be preserved by the combined strengths of Radio 1 and local radio, both of which were under threat. For the BBC its very survival in the long term now seems to be predicated on a dual aspect to its radio output i.e. a strong local service allied with a strong network presence. The report also considers the potential competitive effect of a commercial national network which was being advocated with some vigour by the IBA.

In March 1980 senior managers from BBC Radio met at Ditchley Park, a secluded country house in the heart of the Cotswolds (Hendy 2007, p118) to look ahead to the next five to fifteen years in radio i.e. 1985 to 1995. The report which followed the conference[196] began by painting a picture of the changing radio environment with an emphasis on the suspected future competition from other media particularly television in various guises of local television, breakfast television, a fourth channel, cable television and teletext services[197] as well as video cassette recording. It also highlighted direct radio competition in the form of an expansion in commercial local radio. This would lead to a growing overlap and competition between stations in a particular area which it was thought, with a considerable degree of prescience, might encourage greater programming specialisation, a scenario in which the public would need to know exactly what choice of services the BBC was offering amongst 'all the other competing sounds which can be heard along the dial'.[198] The report proposes a substantive re-adjustment of the BBC's thinking on radio centred around a re-defining of the very concept of public service radio in order to make it appropriate to a broadcasting world which is increasingly pluralist. In order to enable this it was proposed that the existing number of national networks should be reduced while BBC local stations should receive greater support in the belief that local broadcasting was the primary growth area in radio. At this point we see the BBC focussing its energy on local radio. This was deemed the main area of competitive threat and therefore an expansion of the BBC's own local portfolio was necessary.[199]

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[196] Ditchley Conference Paper: Radio 1985-1995, March 1980. BBC WAC: Radio Services Policy, R92/2/1.
[197] EG BBC Ceefax and ITV Oracle which had been running since 1974.
[198] Ditchley Conference Paper: Radio 1985-1995, March 1980. BBC WAC: Radio Services Policy, R92/2/1.
[199] Ibid.

Two years later BBC Radio produced its Radio Programme Strategy[200] for consideration by the Board of Management and Board of Governors which outlined its vision for the 1990s. Unlike the Ditchley Report this report eschewed a restriction of the national networks but instead was keen on retaining a broad range of output and envisaged any contraction of existing services as potentially damaging to the BBC in competitive terms. The renewed long term plan for BBC Radio was now based on, among other principles, maintaining a broad range of output, keeping the four national networks and a local radio network covering 95% of the UK and establishing clear channel identities.[201]

It would appear a series of policy shifts of emphasis had taken place over the course of this period from national to local and back again to national in tandem with local. As the 1990s approached another threat loomed on the horizon, namely a national commercial station. The BBC was by now fairly certain that the commercial operators would now 'strive for their own national radio network.'[202]

Conclusion

From April 1971 the separate radio licence was abolished. The BBC licence fee would now cover television and radio which meant BBC Radio found itself in the dubious position of having to make claims on licence revenue, most of which would be directed to the more expensive and popular medium of television. On the face of it this could have sounded the death knell for radio but a number of factors contributed to its continued survival namely; the pirates had shown that radio could compete with television at a certain level; local radio was seen as a saviour for the medium; commercial interests were keen on investing in local radio and *Broadcasting in the Seventies* spelt out the long term strategy of the BBC.

While it is true to say that the BBC's vision for its own local and national services certainly ensured the survival of radio, the role played by the commercial sector must also be celebrated. The initial ILR stations remained committed despite financial

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[200] Radio Programme Strategy, September 1982. BBC WAC: Radio Services Policy R92/2/1.
[201] ibid.
[202] Note by Aubrey Singer (Managing Director, BBC Radio), 3 December 1980. BBC WAC Commercial Radio General R92/301/1.

uncertainties and it was the commercial sector's ability to moult its 'independent' skin and embrace a 'commercial' model that in many ways helped ensure the very future of sound broadcasting, not just for itself but for the BBC as well. The true significance of the Heathrow Conference cannot be underestimated here. Street (2006, p209) quite rightly believes it culminated in the 1990 Broadcasting Act which finally allowed the independent sector to become fully liberated to act in its own best interests and it could be argued it also provoked the BBC into a further re-alignment of its services and injected a new vitality into the radio landscape of the 1990s.

The period covered in this chapter was in many ways one of the most dynamic in radio history. A plethora of new ILR stations seeking to establish themselves alongside a BBC desperate to hold its ground, heralded a new competitive arena which forced the actors therein to effectively mould the foundations of a new and more solid broadcasting template. It was an era which also marked a change in the philosophy of radio. The dominant BBC Reithian ideology of the previous decades was initially imposed upon the commercial sector which had previously been immune to its constraints but it was this very sector which was to embrace a system where Reithianism lost its currency and was to be replaced by one where audience maximisation was axiomatic. It was also a period of relative uncertainty. For the commercial sector this came in the form of struggling for financial survival. For the BBC the 1980s was one of the most difficult decades in its history as it came into 'direct conflict with a government deeply suspicious of the very idea of state funded public service and quick to attack the expression of liberal or left of centre views' (Chignell 2011, p151).

The introduction of a legitimate commercial arm did have a number of discernible effects on the UK radio industry. As well as shifting the core philosophy, it created greater choice and hence a potent competitive element but that competition was not simply between the BBC and the ILR stations but rather a circular model of competition where BBC national radio stations, BBC local stations and commercial radio stations were competing with and between each other. In such a turbulent arena where the commercial sector was attempting to find its foothold while the BBC was endeavouring to regain its, any spirit of genuine cooperation was lacking. There was perhaps good reason for this. What had been created in this period was in effect a new UK radio industry. One dominated by a long-standing and previously monopolistic player who

regarded competition with unease and a new profit driven player desperately seeking to remodel the nature of the industry. Chignell (2011, p139) describes the commercial sector's contribution to journalism as 'unfettered by the caution and smugness of the BBC' and that it 'innovated to the point of recklessness.' This can equally apply to all of the commercial sector's output and therefore any wholesale linking with the BBC was going to be unlikely.

As the new industry consolidated, the disparate relationship between the BBC and its new competitors now became firmly cast in stone and would remain so until the necessity of promoting DAB would begin to chip away at the foundations laid down at this time.

Chapter 3

Competition on All Fronts:

The BBC and Commercial Radio,

1988 – 1995

This chapter examines the period 1988 to 1995 which is characterised by a number of salient points in the history of British radio. These emanated largely from the 1990 Broadcasting Act which aimed to reform the entire structure of British broadcasting and marked the first step in its total deregulation. It also led to the creation of the first Independent National Radio (INR) stations at a UK wide level thus opening up a new arena of competition beyond the local. This ultimately led to a realignment of the BBC services directly affected by this new trance of competition.

The previous chapter examined the radio battle between the BBC and Independent Local Radio (ILR) as it was the primary characteristic of the period under consideration. However other competitive forces were still in operation throughout and they will be considered in greater detail in this chapter including their status up to 1995. These forces include the ubiquitous Radio Luxembourg as well as other pirate stations such as for example, the enduring Radio Caroline and the new upstart, Atlantic 252 as well as other variants which arose from within the ILR sector itself and the resurgent notion of a form of community radio. Many changes were occurring within the BBC too during this time; an expansion of local radio, a restructuring of the national networks as well as sweeping changes to the running of the organisation as a whole.

The chapter begins with an analysis of the various non-ILR and non-BBC radio actors before going on to examine the commercial sector itself and finally the BBC in an attempt to highlight the now ever more increasingly competitive nature of the UK radio industry and examines how the market dynamic impacted upon relations between the actors involved. This forms another backdrop to the uncooperative nature of the relationship between the BBC and the commercial sector which by the end of this period would be transformed largely due to the impact of DAB.

Non-ILR and Non-BBC Radio Actors: Outside the Box

Before the arrival of ILR in the UK, the BBC's most persistent and enduring rival was Radio Luxembourg.[203] It managed to survive the era of the pirates who were as much its competitor as the BBC's and it continued to hold its ground following the creation of BBC Radio 1 in 1967, particularly in the evenings when Radio 1 shared its airtime with Radio 2 (Barnard 1989, p158). So confident was Radio Luxembourg that it cheekily sent the management of Radio 1 a message of congratulations on the latter's opening day (Briggs 1995, vol 5, p574) and in 1968 Radio Luxembourg decided to take on Radio 1 directly by changing its format from relaying sponsored pre-recorded programmes to broadcasting live with commercial breaks (Frith 1978, p89) thus taking the initiative ahead of the ILR stations which would follow five years later. The BBC appeared to have had a better relationship with Radio Luxembourg than British based competitors during this period under review. Following a request from Radio Luxembourg regarding access to BBC audience research findings about Radio Luxembourg and other radio services, the Controller of Radio 1 and Radio 2 was keen to help provide this information[204] suggesting that Radio Luxembourg may have been seen within the BBC as a different kind of competitor and one that could potentially play a role in keeping the ILR stations at bay.

It can be argued that the dynamic nature of the pirates and the potential of the new ILRs both created a new interest in the medium of radio from which Radio Luxembourg benefitted, so for it competition was always seen as beneficial but it also tailored its output in a way to cleverly meet the demands of its audience by focussing on a young age group and it was certainly aided in this with developments in transistor technology. These factors had enabled Radio Luxembourg to become a 'cherished part of the UK radio landscape throughout the 1960s' (Radcliffe 2011) and would continue to do so into the 1970s and 1980s. However, Radio Luxembourg finally came to an end on medium wave in December 1991, although it continued for a few months thereafter as a satellite channel. Street (2002, p111) suggests that although Radio Luxembourg had managed to survive for so long, it was much diminished in its cultural significance by the age of off-shore radio and then the coming of Radio 1. This however overlooks the argument that radio's cultural status in general had been shifting downward since the

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[203] The English language service of Radio Luxembourg began in 1933. See Chapter 1.
[204] Memo from Head of Audience Research, 18 June 1974. BBC WAC: Audience Research, Commercial Radio R78/3, 861/1.

arrival of television, almost to the point where its position as a cultural form became discredited among media historians (Hilmes 2002, p5). Street's suggestion also does not take into account the role played by ILR in Radio Luxembourg's eventual downfall. As Radio Luxembourg's English service broadcast pop music only in the evenings,[205] Radio 1 may not be seen as its natural competitor since its evening fayre consisted of more specialist music shows such as those hosted throughout the 1980s by DJs such as John Peel and Kid Jensen.[206] If anything it was the repositioning of ILR towards the end of the 1980s, playing pop music and transmitting on a superior FM signal, and the prospect of the arrival of INR that really sounded the death knell for Radio Luxembourg (Crisell 1994, p38).

In 1989, RTL Group[207] teamed up with the Irish state broadcaster, Radio Telefís Éireann (RTE), in what the BBC described as a 'curious alliance'[208] to create Atlantic 252, an English-language pop music station broadcasting on long wave from the Republic of Ireland[209] with advertising content specifically aimed at the UK audience. Initially the station only broadcast until 7.00pm and ended with an announcement encouraging listeners to switch to Radio Luxembourg for the duration of the evening. Once Radio Luxembourg ceased broadcasting on medium wave in 1992, Atlantic 252 began broadcasting 24 hours a day in order to fill the gap. Atlantic 252 certainly made an impact on the UK radio landscape, attracting healthy audiences[210] and investment from advertisers and stayed in operation until 2002 when its long wave frequency was taken over by RTÉ Radio 1.[211] What Atlantic 252 critically proved was that a radio station could still survive on a wave band other than FM. Radio Luxembourg's demise was seen as the result of audiences wanting to listen in better quality but Atlantic 252's success showed that either audiences were content to continue to listen on an inferior band such as long wave or they were not prepared to invest in new sets, whether at home or in the car, that supported FM. As Malm and Wallis (1992, p126) conclude,

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[205] In 1989 a daytime English service returned on Radio Luxembourg but aimed at Scandinavian audiences.
[206] Shows like these which broadcast roughly from 8pm to midnight focussed on new music.
[207] Radio Luxembourg's parent company.
[208] Board of Management Meeting minutes, 17 Feb 1986. BBC WAC: Commercial Radio, General R92/301/1.
[209] Atlantic 252 broadcast from Trim, County Meath although it carefully concealed its location from British audiences (Horgan 2001, p154).
[210] By 1998 Atlantic 252 was achieving and audience share of 1.4% compared to Talk Radio's 1.6% and Virgin 1215's 2.6% (RAJAR Q4 1998).
[211] Irish national network broadcasting a mixture of music and speech programming.

Atlantic 252 found a good foothold in the UK despite the inherent reception problems of long wave by:

> Beaming a non-stop pop chart format into western Wales and north-west England after a massive advertising campaign and despite its mono long wave signal. Atlantic 252 has won a considerable following amongst younger listeners in its target area where there is no competition from any local commercial radio station.

Atlantic 252 managed to hold an audience of between 3 to 4 million across the UK until 1998 (Stoller 2010, p217) despite not really encroaching upon the populous areas of London and the south east of England. Despite its piratical nature, it embraced many of the general rules that applied to independent radio in the UK and as Stoller (ibid) notes, it generally conducted itself as part of the legitimate commercial community. It was eventually seen off in 2002 by the repositioning of Radio 1 and Radio 2 over the course of the 1990s. Atlantic 252 makes an interesting case study for the student of pirate radio as in many ways a pirate, it also possessed a fully legal status in that it was licensed by the Irish government and seemed to enjoy a position of privilege compared to other pirate stations.

It could be argued that the arrival of commercial radio in the UK meant that long established stations such as Radio Luxembourg and newcomers like Atlantic 252 found themselves financially more secure simply because advertisers were now more aware of the benefits of radio advertising and therefore were willing to invest in the medium.[212] Although illegal under the Marine Broadcasting Offences Act, occasional English commercials could be heard on a number of pirate stations such as Radio Caroline throughout the 1970s and 1980s which continued to broadcast from a vessel called *Mi Amigo* and subsequently the *Ross Revenge* transmitting a 24 hour English service (Harris 2014, p226). Another example was Laser 558, launched in May 1984 and broadcasting from the ship *MV Communicator* in international waters in the North Sea. It too attracted an audience within months of setting up, thanks to a strong signal and continuous music fayre, only to close in late 1985 (Leonard 1996, p407). Although this suggests a sort of offshore pirate radio renaissance in the 1980s, the government was

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[212] Douglas, T., Commercial Radio: the 19 stations that showed why the cynics were wrong. *Campaign Magazine,* 2 July 1976.

determined to put a stop to it and managed to do so once and for all under the 1990 Broadcasting Act. An amendment was made to the Marine Broadcasting Offences Act within the 1990 Broadcasting Act, known as 'Section 42', which enabled the British government to take a 'non-territorial or marine approach to offshore radio governance' (Peters 2011). The new clause allowed the government to legally board any radio vessel whose broadcasts reached UK territory.[213] Once 'Section 42' came into effect in January 1991, the last remaining offshore pirate, Radio Caroline, finally succumbed and ceased broadcasting.

By the late 1980s however a new breed of pirates had begun to operate, not on the high seas but 'cloaked in the anonymity of urban sprawl' (Mason 2008, p43). These new pirates operated wholly on the clearer FM band, catering for a new generation of radio listeners particularly in London. These pirates were more difficult to tackle. The authorities can detect a pirate's homemade antenna easily, usually tacked to the top of a tower block, but the studio connected to the antenna by a less powerful and undetectable microwave signal, is more difficult to track down. Transmitters were found and confiscated but studios were harder to find and stations selling advertising could afford to replace lost antennae within hours and thus began 'a game of cat and mouse with the authorities' (Mason ibid). How these new 'urban' pirates differed from the previous pirate model was that they were not catering for a general pop music audience but instead were providing airtime for various musical sub-cultures and indeed with so much success that Mason (ibid) claims by 1997 the specialist pirate stations in London were attracting as much as 10% of London's radio audience. Urban musical genres such as hardcore, techno, drum 'n' bass, UK garage, grime and dubstep are some underground movements that developed with the help of these stations (Blake 1997) and it all began with the Acid House explosion of the late 1980s (Collin 2009) a movement that unlike the mainstream music industry was characterised by 'decentralisation and independent productions' (Hesmondhalgh 1998) which would in themselves find little outlet on mainstream radio.[214]

A fine example of a station illustrating this new pirate broadcasting model was Kiss FM which began in 1985 broadcasting hip-hop and house from the suburb of Crystal Palace

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[213] This was also now permitted under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

[214] Radio 1's sole contribution to the dance music scene at the time consisted of a three hour show on Friday nights, *Jeff Young's Big Beat Show*, until a reorganisation of the network in the early 1990s brought in programmes catering for other genres.

in south London (Goddard 2011) with a roster of DJs that included Tim Westwood, Pete Tong, Trevor Nelson and Dave Pearce, all of whom would eventually move to Radio 1 when it decided to cater for this very audience. By 1990 Kiss FM was so popular it was granted a licence and went on to become a multi-million pound media franchise which went on to turn over £161 million in 2005 (Mason 2008, p45) and the executives in charge then still recognised where its kudos came from and still recruited pirate DJs from other underground stations to replace the bigger names once they moved to the BBC (Mason ibid). So we see an interesting pattern of progression for broadcasters emerging which is similar to that which occurred when Radio 1 came to air in 1967. DJs establish their reputation at pirate stations and on achieving a certain status are then recruited by the BBC to deliver the same output but to a national audience. In many ways this works to the BBC's advantage, as it can sit back and survey the underground radio landscape to see what listeners really want to hear then hire established voices to attract that very audience to Radio 1. It would appear that this might be a parasitic relationship with the BBC engorged with an audience initially fostered by the pirate stations but it also shows that the role of the pirates had changed dramatically from being a provider of populist music to being at the cutting edge of new musical genres. Ultimately it places the power in the hands of listeners as it was for example, their support for Kiss FM which led the authorities to grant the station a licence and ultimately led the BBC to provide content which would cater for their tastes. Perhaps the BBC's position had mellowed too and its attitudes to the pirates had changed from the damning indictment of the 1960s:

> The pirates were efficient thieves. They stole wavelengths. They stole news. They stole the copyright of composers, musicians and disc makers. (Edwards 1968).

Commercial Radio: Achieving a National Platform

The 1987 Green Paper, *Radio: Choices and Opportunities*[215] was the response to the challenges issued by ILRs at Heathrow and thereafter. It recognised changes were needed in the regulatory framework for ILR. The paper paved the way for the 1990 Broadcasting Act thus heralding a number of changes crucial to the history of British

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[215] Radio: Choices and Opportunities. Green Paper, Cm 92, London: HMSO, February 1987.

radio. The core changes of the Act were a demarcation from television by the creation of a separate regulator, namely the Radio Authority,[216] the loosening of the public service remit, permitting consolidation of ownership of radio companies and the launch of Independent National Radio (INR).[217] Although now following a similar pattern to commercial television, it attracted less controversy and public concern than television did (Barendt and Hitchens 2000, p99). For the ILRs it can be argued the regulatory processes changed overnight under the Radio Authority as the Broadcasting Act 1990 radically shook the UK's public service ecology;

> Prior to 1990 all broadcasters were public service broadcasters…
> after 1990… broadcasters were only required to abide by negative
> content regulation… and not positive content obligations (Cowling 2004,
> p64).

A new found financial confidence led to the creation of media companies attracted to profit who saw a healthy return could be achieved from sound broadcasting. This new found confidence which took hold in the latter part of the 1980s meant the ILRs could continue their protest against the IBA's restrictive nature and direct independent radio even more down the commercial path. The Peacock Committee which reported on 29 May 1986,[218] bolstered the ILRs' stance by proposing that IBA regulation of radio should be replaced by a looser regime. Bizarrely Peacock also proposed the BBC should take over failing ILR stations or indeed successful ILRs could buy out a BBC station if the BBC was willing to sell (Stoller 2010, p164), thus envisaging a scenario which never came to fruition of full blown competition between the BBC and the commercial sector essentially fighting over each other's assets.

As commercial prospects improved so did the influence of larger radio groups who became the new players on the commercial radio stage as the rules of ownership changed. The 1990 Act limited companies to owning no more than 20 local stations and of those, no more than 6 could be large licences. This accumulation of ownership saw the emergence of some of the companies which would in the future become the major players in leading the commercial sector. So by 1994, companies such as Capital,

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[216] Formed on 1 January 1990.

[217] The Act also catered for the expansion of Community although these plans remained undeveloped until well into the 2000s.

[218] Report of the Committee on Financing the BBC (Peacock Report) 1986 (Cmnd 9824).

Emap, Scottish Radio Holdings, TransWorld, GWR, and Chrysalis had made their mark on commercial radio. In fact these companies began to demand even more freedom to expand and this happened under the later 1996 Broadcasting Act which permitted even greater concentration of ownership so that there were 14 separate mergers or acquisitions in 1996 and a further 13 in 1997.

With investment and expansion these companies brought some important changes to programming philosophy within the commercial sector which it can be argued truly secured the sector's survival; not only that but they also ensured its very dominance over the BBC at this time. In July 1995 the Radio Authority received a request from the GWR group to be allowed to network programmes across virtually all its stations i.e. a dozen FM stations and 8 AM stations. It was aiming to transform its disparate portfolio of local stations into an American style network and introduce trans-Atlantic style commercial radio networks to the UK (Stoller ibid, p255). As Stoller notes Steve Orchard, the Head of Programmes at GWR wanted to:

> Improve the quality of presentation for listeners in local areas and to
> help even our smallest sites to compete against BBC national networks…
> We are now actively negotiating with a number of national radio
> personalities who are ready to 'come over' to the commercial side.

Thus we see for the first time, the commercial sector setting out to poach BBC talent in a complete reversal of what had happened with the launch of Radio 1 in 1967 or when the urban pirates appeared in the late 1980s when the BBC was doing the poaching. Critics could however argue that the names moving from the BBC to the commercial sector at this point were those whose own BBC careers may have been coming to an end anyway.[219]

The arrival of the big radio groups in the early 1990s certainly represent a landmark in British commercial radio history simply because they represent a new found economic confidence in the medium, but also because they gave the commercial sector the ability to compete on a par with the BBC for the first time in its history. It also, for the first time in its history, shifted the balance of power in the commercial radio industry from the regulator (the Radio Authority) to the largest ILR owners. Any notion of

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[219] E.g. Dave Lee Travis, Paul Burnett.

independent radio was now totally erased by a genuine commercial drive to deal with radio broadcasting. In 1993 advertising income had jumped from £141m to a record £178.3m and share prices soared (Stoller ibid, p245). Stoller goes on to say that these were years of personal and corporate money making but often at expense of investment in programme output which is an interesting dichotomy but surely an unsurprising one as a pure commercial model could only cater for a populist output, and to be free of the shackles of PSB was what the sector had been desperate to achieve for a number of years.

Another aid to this was the proposal to abolish simulcasting i.e. broadcasting the same services on FM and AM wavelengths. By end of 1989 split services were now provided by many stations, in effect giving the existing ILRs the opportunity to target two separate audiences. Thus we see Capital offering a golden oldie service *Capital Gold* on AM which had the effect of actually increasing Capital's share of London's listening from 17% to 28% (Stoller ibid, p200). LBC's split into separate news and talk stations was predicted by its owners[220] to increase its listenership by 15% as its news station (LBC Crown FM) and its talk station (Talkback Radio) directed themselves towards Radio 4 and Radio 2 respectively.[221] However by 1992 it became apparent that the investment required to operate separate networks was having a detrimental effect on return as Capital's profits went down by a third over 1991 with the same happening to LBC. The split between FM and AM in 1989 had not worked with both stations losing some audience (Stoller ibid, p227).

It is critical to note at this point the important role played by the commercial sector in radicalising content. From 1987 Capital's new contemporary hits radio format began to change the face of pop music radio in the UK and its impact on the BBC was profound. Stoller (ibid, p164) argues this change of content nominally known as Contemporary Hit Radio (CHR), and introduced at Capital by Richard Park, spread throughout the ILR system and gave ILR almost 10 years dominance of the centre ground of popular music radio, much to the consternation of the BBC. CHR can be described as:

> A rock/pop music format that plays the current best-selling records.
> The music is characterised as lively upbeat hits. The playlist generally

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[220] Crown Communications.
[221] Crown Promises LBC Listening Boom After Split. *Broadcast Magazine*, 2 September 1989.

consists of 20-40 songs played continuously throughout the day. Disc jockeys are often upbeat personalities and the format emphasizes contests and promotions… targeting a young demographic of both men and women aged 18-34 with a listenership extending into the 35-44 demographic cell (Lee 2004, p621).

Another symbol of success occurred in July 1993 when commercial radio launched a new network chart show sponsored by Pepsi called *The Pepsi Chart Show*. At different stages 80-100 ILR stations carried the networked show. It became the most listened to radio show in the UK with an audience of 3.6 million, at its peak almost 1 million more than the equivalent Radio 1 chart show (Stoller 2010, p233). Yet again it was not the BBC but its competitors who were taking the lead in remoulding British radio, where the competition took the lead the BBC simply seemed to follow. If this could happen at a local level then surely the time was right for it to happen at a national level too.

The most striking proposal of the 1990 Broadcasting Act was that of Independent National Radio (INR), a term that although lurking in the radio background for some time became the new radio buzzword. The notion of national commercial radio was not a new one. Stoller (ibid, p171) claims in the debates around offshore pirates in 1960s there was a moment when BBC's 247 medium wavelength might have been put aside for a single national commercial pop music channel. Later in 1976 the IBA was reflecting on whether it should seek a national channel as at this point IBA believed that:

> Independent Radio can only be a full, credible and effective alternative
> to total BBC radio (as against local BBC radio) if it has both local and
> national channels.[222]

By 1980 the IBA was drawing up preliminary plans for a national commercial station with the aim of breaking the BBC monopoly in UK wide national radio. As the IBA's head of radio John Thompson stated:

> The IBA has made it known to the government that in the right circumstances
> the authority might wish to see this final, lingering state broadcasting

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[222] IBA Paper 194 (76), 19 July 1976.

monopoly challenged.[223]

The use of words like 'in the right circumstances' and 'might wish to see' do however reflect the fact that at this stage a national network was not the primary driving force for the independent sector, instead the urgent priority was the continued development of ILR.

A concerted lobbying effort from commercial broadcasters persuaded Home Secretary, Willie Whitelaw, to announce in March 1983 that the UK would seek international approval for the allocation of VHF frequencies for a new independent national radio network along with a further BBC service on VHF.[224] By 1986 the IBA was able to boast that it could have a national radio service on air within four years. John Thompson's message was now less equivocal:

> The BBC still enjoys a total monopoly in national radio… this is the only monopoly in broadcasting still to survive. The BBC's tenure as the sole supplier of national radio needs in the public interest to be challenged.[225]

The key issue for a new national commercial network was going to be centred around the question of spectrum. For a new network to have a national presence at this time it would have to be allocated an existing BBC medium wave position. By 1989 the BBC was made to give up 1053 and 1089 kHz for one new INR service and 1215 kHz for the other and Stoller (2010, p172) describes a final decisive meeting between the BBC and IBA at the Home Office in 1989 where the BBC, under pressure from the government to offer spectrum to the commercial sector, argued that 'the commercial sector would only need medium wave frequencies, since audience figures showed nobody listened to radio after six o'clock at night' to which Douglas Hurd, the Home Secretary, agreed thus leaving the commercial sector with the impression that any chance of a national network on FM was now lost.

As the Broadcasting Bill went through Parliament however it became apparent that an FM frequency would be employed alongside two AM licences. Fears that the three new

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[223] National Radio Rival to BBC Planned by IBA. *Daily Telegraph,* 20 November 1980.
[224] New Frequencies: Same Radio Shows. *New Scientist,* 21 April 1983.
[225] BBC Radio Rival 'Inside Four Years'. *The Times,* 24 February 1986.

stations would simply provide near identical pop music were to be assuaged by the government who guaranteed the three new services would each be devoted to a different themes and the first national commercial station would provide classical music, thus competing head to head with BBC Radio 3, while the AM services would be for news and music.[226] It would appear that the commercial sector's recent experience of what one can call 'intra-sector competition' i.e. of competing within itself, had now made it reluctant to support a national pop music network, in other words a type of network that had become the mainstay of the sector. There was therefore relief within the Radio Authority when the Government announced on the 30 October 1990 that the FM licence would be for a 'non-pop music service'[227] thus allaying fears among the ILR stations that the biggest threat to their existence would come not from the BBC but from other commercial companies willing to take the profit motive to a national level.

When the Radio Authority advertised the first national licence in the national press on 11 January 1991, there was a feeling that at least the new national networks were more likely to complement rather than compete with ILR stations. Classic FM was subsequently awarded the first national commercial licence and began broadcasting on 7 September 1992. As a station devoted to classical music, Classic FM's achievements were quoted in comparison to BBC Radio 3 which also concentrated largely on classical music and indeed from the outset the former performed well, pulling in a weekly audience of 4.3 million after only five months on air, while Radio 3's audience dropped to 2.5 million making Classic FM now the fourth largest radio station in the country.[228] Its success against Radio 3 was largely due to the fact that it delivered classical music in a different format[229] and 'successfully marketed an output that previously appealed only to minority tastes' (Kubacki and Croft 2004). Although in terms of content, Classic FM's natural competitor may have been envisaged as Radio 3, its different format and style of presentation meant that its actual rivals were more likely to be Radio 2 and Radio 4. Thus we see the commercial model at the national level employing its skill at adapting format and style to encroach upon the BBC's national services.

On 2 April 1992 the Radio Authority awarded its second national licence to Independent Music Radio, a consortium owned by TV AM plc and Virgin

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[226] Thatcher Orders More Specialised Radio. *Financial Times*, 17 April 1990.
[227] Radio Authority Press Release, 30 October 1990.
[228] RAJAR Q1 1993.
[229] Populist, shorter, light classical music with a familiar presentation style.

Communications Ltd. The station was to be called Virgin 1215[230] and it began broadcasting on 30 April 1993 with an adult orientated rock format and with the backing of Richard Branson. Like Classic FM many would have envisaged Virgin to have a natural BBC competitor, in this case Radio 1, but like Classic FM it also traversed the single competitor boundary and both Radio 1 and Radio 2 began to feel its effects. It too built an audience managing to quickly achieve early, respectable weekly audience figures of 2.16 million by autumn 1993.[231] That figure was to rise to almost 4 million by the end of 1994[232] but eventually settled and did not exceed 3.5 million for the remainder of the 1990s meaning it was on occasions outflanked by Atlantic 252 and the BBC's poorest performing station, Radio 3.[233] Virgin management were all too aware of the problem, namely that it could only be heard on medium wave and the recent demise of Radio Luxembourg could have done little to boost their confidence. With reception in many parts of the country, including the all-important London and the south east area, patchy or even non-existent,[234] Virgin's management knew it had to find a presence on FM. This was of course a desire even before the station launched and Stoller (2010, p217) reveals a meeting between the BBC and the commercial sector when, just a few days before launch, Richard Branson visited BBC Director General, John Birt, to discuss the possibility of swapping frequencies with Branson swapping the 1215 medium wave frequency for Radio 4's 93.5 FM frequency. Branson however came armed with a threat; should Birt relinquish the frequency then Branson would save him having to bid for Radio 1 instead when it was privatised, something which was still a possibility at the time. In the end the Radio Authority eventually offered Virgin an FM licence for the London region from April 2005.

The final national network was to be a speech network and Talk Radio[235] began on 14 February 1995. It was a speech network certainly not modelled on Radio 4 but instead consisted of 'shock jocks' with the unadulterated objective of provoking the audience. This was a style of broadcasting which, while familiar in the USA (Hayes and Zechowski 2014), had not been very widespread in the UK except for some late night talk shows on some ILR stations but now was to have a national audience. The

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[230] 1215 referring to the medium wave frequency.
[231] RAJAR Q3 1993.
[232] RAJAR Q4 1994.
[233] Atlantic 252 average audience = 3.9 million, Radio 3 = 3.1 million. (Source: RAJAR).
[234] *Daily Telegraph,* 18 November 1993.
[235] Now known as Talksport.

verbosity often got Talk Radio in trouble however and after incurring numerous fines it had to tone down its output.

The early years of the 1990s are hugely significant for the commercial sector. It had thrown off the shackles of the IBA and was now operating in an environment it had been striving to create since the Heathrow conference. It could be argued that any remnants of independent radio had now totally disappeared and a commercial ethos permeated the entire sector thus begging the question if any of the commercial companies were genuinely maintaining a social responsibility at this point. If Stoller marries the notion of independent radio with a PSB responsibility or indeed a nod to Reithianism, then his statement may be inaccurate as the critical shift that occurred in the commercial sector at this time rendered it totally detached from the attributes of the erstwhile independent radio model. The expansion of ILR,[236] the arrival of networked stations and finally the holy grail of national stations meant that a paradigm shift had occurred in the independent sector i.e. it had instead become a fully fledged commercial sector. This was also reflected in its performance. In 1993, the 20th birthday of the commercial sector, audience numbers were up by 2 million for all commercial radio and advertising revenue was recovering as the recent recession came to an end. It now had 3 national stations and 170 local stations offering 30,000 hours of programming per week with an audience of 26.4 million adults and taking 43% of all radio listening in the UK (Stoller 2010, p234). Commercial radio had seemingly achieved its goal.

BBC Radio: A Period of Crisis

The BBC's attitude toward the independent radio sector in the latter's early years was to say the least, relaxed. By the end of the first year of independent radio the Controller of Radio 1 and Radio 2, Douglas Muggeridge was not unduly concerned:

> Today as we approach the first anniversary of commercial radio I am able
> to report BBC radio has experienced no loss of audience, if anything our
> figures are running slightly higher than last year. The large audiences quoted

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[236] 16 new ILR licences were awarded in 1992.

by the commercial stations bear no relation to our figures.[237] It should be remembered that the 6 commercial stations cover nearly 40% of the population or 20 million people per week, this is not much less than our own BBC local stations which can be received by approximately 25 million people per week.[238]

What permeates the early years of the independent sector is a skant recognition of its position as any meagre form of threat from within the BBC. A perusal of the memoirs of former Directors General Charles Curran (Curran 1979)[239] or Alasdair Milne (Milne 1988)[240] proves this point as they both refer only fleetingly to the independent radio sector in what are otherwise extensive reminiscences from the world of broadcasting. It could be argued that for the BBC, localism in radio had diminished in importance from its heyday in the late 1960s and came lower down the pecking order of priorities even as far as its own services were concerned and this was backed up by a future Director General, Ian Trethowan:[241]

> Local radio has been a factor in binding together an area but whatever has been achieved by different forms of community radio and however it may be developed of the next decade, in the foreseeable future the heart of BBC radio will be the national networks. It has been through the networks that we have been able to offer listeners not only a wide range of programmes but programmes which have aimed at the highest quality. It's where we sustain our cultural output and daily journalism (Trethowan 1975).

If any perceived threat from the commercial sector went unappreciated during the 1970s and 1980s it certainly was to become a reality towards the end of the 1980s as the commercial sector both expanded in range and experimented in output. While the new commercially driven local stations were in themselves a major concern, particularly for Radio 1, it was the arrival of a national presence which was most perturbing,

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[237] Disagreement between the commercial sector and the BBC over audience figures and the methodology employed to calculate them would persist until a single measurement system agreed by both bodies was established almost 20 years later under the auspices of RAJAR.
[238] BBC Press Release, 24 September 1974. BBC WAC Audience Research Commercial Radio R78/3, 861/1)
[239] Director General 1969-1977.
[240] Director General 1982-1987.
[241] Director General 1977-1982, at this time was Managing Director, BBC Network Radio.

particularly as they had the capability of causing damage to the BBC's other national networks which up until this point had been largely regarded as 'safe' from competitive interference.

Within the BBC the 1990s began with a couple of actions which could be deemed defensive. Radio 2 became the first BBC national service to broadcast exclusively on the FM frequency[242] and a brand new national station began on the AM frequency called Radio 5. Radio 5 was introduced on 27 August 1990 on Radio 2's now redundant Medium Wave capacity and carried a mixture of sport, children's and educational programmes. Its mission statement appeared nebulous and many considered it a 'dumping ground' of sorts (Crisell 1997, p208) and indeed it was created as a solution to the government's desire to end simulcasting of the same services on both AM and FM. The BBC's Director of Radio at the time, Jenny Abramsky sums it up succinctly as being a repository for:

> The sports output from Radio 2 Medium Wave, all the Schools and Continuing Education programmes from Radio 4 FM, the Open University programmes from Radios 3 and 4 FM and programmes for children and young people from Radio 4 and some World Service output. This was a network with no audience focus, born out of expediency (Abramsky 2002b).

The campaign to relinquish simulcasting across the BBC networks coincided with the 1991 Gulf War[243] which provoked the BBC to introduce a rolling news coverage network on Radio 4's FM frequency with the regular scheduled service continuing on Long Wave. Although officially named Radio 4 News FM the service soon became nicknamed 'Scud FM'[244] (Hendy 2007, p344) and its success inspired the BBC to aim to provide a new permanent, national, rolling news network. However with Radio 4 listeners marching on Broadcasting House to protest against any such network being housed permanently on either of Radio 4's AM or FM frequencies (Hendy ibid) and with the audience for Radio 5 being so fragmented (Starkey 2006, p24) it was clear where the new service would sit. Thus Radio 5 was replaced by a rolling news and sport network on 28 March 1994 and renamed Radio 5 Live.

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[242] i.e. no concomitant service on AM.
[243] From 16 January to 2 March 1991.
[244] From the Scud missiles used by the Iraqi forces in the war,

The new found self-confidence of the commercial sector at both a local and national level meant it was now competing with the BBC on an equal footing. But as far as local radio was concerned, the BBC remained ebullient and it was helped by the fact that many of its stations were to be found on the FM band. Not only that, but the BBC had been quietly content with its local radio performance vis-a-vis ILR stations. By 1988 the BBC was able to boast that its local radio service was among the most listened to of radio services available with 16 of the 32 English stations reaching at least 30% of their target population and a regular total weekly audience of 10 million.[245] Even the former Director of Radio, Frank Gillard was able to comment that BBC local radio had 'won its spurs' in terms its PSB responsibilities.[246]

The major area of contention for the BBC as the commercial sector found its feet at first a local and then a national level was the impact on its national networks and in particular its most popular station, Radio 1. As Radio 1 entered its 25th year in 1992 its audience figures began to plummet. While the ILRs, the pirates and Atlantic 252, as well as the imminent arrival of Virgin 1215 may be seen as contributing factors, much of the fault lay within the BBC itself as many cultural commentators began to accuse Radio 1 of abandoning its core role of providing a clearly defined music service delivered in an attractive manner. Much of the criticism centred on the DJs, many of whom it was believed had been 'sat in front of the microphone too long.'[247] Curiously the function of Radio 1 as a provider of both pop and specialist music programming still held 'an exalted position among its audience group' (Morrison 1992) which accounted for 28% of the population, 83% of which were in the 16-44 age group (Morrison ibid). The situation at Radio 1 had developed into a major crisis by 1993, arguably one of the corporation's biggest in terms of faltering networks. It created a tremendous amount of tension internally as leaders began public arguments about how the situation should be properly addressed with the new Managing Director of Network Radio, Liz Forgan,[248] pledging her support for Radio 1 'continuing in its present form'[249] while Janet Street Porter, BBC TV Head of Youth Programmes, called for a 'mixed network with a greater volume of speech content.'[250] Radio 1 exemplified the:

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[245] *Ariel*, 27 July 1988.

[246] *Radio Times*, 7 November 1987.

[247] How Radio 1 Has Failed Pop. Tony Parsons. *Daily Telegraph*, 22 September 1992.

[248] Managing Director, Network Radio, 1993-1996.

[249] *The Guardian,* 18 February 1993.

[250] *Daily Telegraph*, 26 February 1993.

relationship between the media industries and public 'taste', and…
the role of popular culture within public service broadcasting
organisations typified by the BBC (Hendy 2000b).

The atmosphere of despondency surrounding Radio 1's struggle to maintain its identity
and its audience was compounded by constant media reports that the government was
considering proposals that Radio 1 and Radio 2 should carry advertising[251] or even be
sold off completely as argued vehemently by the Radio Authority in its response to the
1992 Green Paper on the future of the BBC.[252] Relations between the BBC and the
commercial sector had reached an all-time low with the latter pursuing a relentless
campaign against Radio 1 in the hope that the government might see its privatisation as
the solution. The Radio Authority's position on this changed slightly however towards
the end of 1993 as a report it commissioned from the Henley Centre hinted at the fact
that although there might be benefits to be had from a privatised Radio 1 there was a
chance that such a step might have a 'detrimental effect on the sector as a whole due to
the possible losses that could be inflicted on ILR and INR should a company within the
commercial sector take it over.'[253]

As well as constant calls for the selling off of Radio 1, the AIRC constantly monitored
Radio 1 so as to point out any inconsistencies in its terms under the BBC charter. So for
example in May 1993 the AIRC was able to accuse Radio 1 of breaching its own
licence by bringing in a form of back door advertising to the network, claiming the
record industry and other companies were spending £1 million a year on promotions
with Radio 1 in return for publicity for their products.[254] The culmination of the huge
amount of attention being paid to Radio 1 at the time ultimately led to the resignation of
its Controller, Johnny Beerling,[255] in June 1993.

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[251] *Independent on Sunday*, 27 June 1993.
[252] Green Paper: The Future of the BBC. 1992. Cmnd 2098.
[253] Privatisation of Radio 1. A Report for the Radio Authority and AIRC, Henley Centre,
November 1993.
[254] Radio 1 'Backdoor' Adverts Infuriate Commercial Rivals. *Sunday Times,* 16 May 1993.
[255] Controller, Radio 1, 1985-1993. For more on Beerling's time at Radio 1 see Beerling (2015).

If the previous few years had been turbulent then the next few were to be a veritable maelstrom. Matthew Bannister[256] took over as Radio 1 Controller in July 1993 and set about changing the station's character in an attempt to ensure it could survive calls from the commercial sector for it to be sold off (Beerling 2015, p429) Essentially this involved getting rid of long serving DJs and bringing in more populist and younger presenters as well as specialist music presenters to reflect the various emerging music genres thus making it distinctive from commercial stations playing popular music.

Bannister's initial moves actually proved disastrous as only a year after implementing change the Radio 1 audience hit an all-time low, losing a staggering 3.4 million over the course of the year and worryingly this drop was almost mirrored by the number of people now tuning into Virgin Radio which itself had overtaken Classic FM as the largest INR station.[257] The threat of Virgin compelled the BBC to produce a special report in May 1994 analysing its competitor's position.[258] The report highlights how Virgin had 'changed its music policy since first coming to air by playing more familiar music and constantly implementing schedule changes in order to achieve a steady growth in audience share' but also concludes that Virgin 'remained less of a threat than the ILR stations and would only pose a serious challenge were it to be awarded a national FM frequency.'[259]

Radio 1's fortunes did turn however once Bannister's changes had settled and he had managed to secure the right presenters for the network, particularly when Chris Evans took over the breakfast show on 24 April 1995. The freefall at Radio 1 finally came to an end literally a few months after Evans started as RAJAR[260] figures showed nearly 600,000 new listeners tuning in, finally bucking a downward trend and heralding a new era of increasing audiences. However, although this improvement was to continue, the BBC was keenly aware of how the enormous threat from the commercial sector had almost brought Radio 1 to its knees and it was now paranoid about possible future

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[256] Controller, Radio 1, 1993-1998.
[257] RAJAR, Q2 1994.
[258] Virgin 1215: How Much of a Threat is it to Radio 1. Special Report SP93/135, May 1994. BBC WAC: R9/1, 474/1.
[259] Virgin was awarded a London FM frequency on 105.8 in April 1995.
[260] RAJAR, Q2 1995.

developments within the commercial sector including 'a further expansion of cross media ownership rules, further ILR syndication and the expansion of Virgin.'[261]

While the early 1990s represented a perilous time for Radio 1, the other national radio networks were under pressure too. In order to get a head start against the forthcoming commercial onslaught the BBC released redesigned logos and branding for all its national networks in April 1990 in an attempt to allow it to 'face up to the challenge within the industry'.[262] Although Radio 2 accounted for 14.7% of all radio listening, its audience had still slipped after losing its medium wave presence in 1991 and it faced a further attack from Classic FM after 1992. At the same time it was bombarded with calls for it to be privatised too including from a former Director General, Alasdair Milne, who described it as 'the weakest link in the chain of BBC radio networks'.[263] Audiences fears that any changes at Radio 2 might promote even more pop music at the expense of specialist music programming had to be allayed by the Controller Frances Line who reassured concerned listeners that these programmes provided:

> An irreplacable service for listeners to and practitioners of many forms
> of music making which are part of this country's rich cultural heritage.[264]

Radio 3, concerned about the arrival of Classic FM, announced sweeping changes in June 1992 aimed at widening its audience with commentators describing them as the network's 'most radical overhaul since it changed its name from the Third Programme in 1967.'[265] A new Controller, Nicholas Kenyon[266], was attempting to make Radio 3 more accessible ahead of the launch of Classic FM but yet again, like Frances Line at Radio 2, his main obstacle was persuading the existing audience that this in no way represented a 'descent into populism' and that the values they held dear regarding their radio station remained intact (Carpenter 1997, p341).

Radio 4 also went through a period of upheaval in the early 1990s. The issue of siting a proposed 24 hour news network on its Long Wave band in 1992 caused huge audience

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[261] UK Commercial Radio. Special Report 95/565C, July 1995. BBC WAC: R9/1, 809/1.
[262] David Hatch, Managing Director, Network Radio. *Ariel,* 3 April 1990.
[263] *The Guardian,* 27 January 1992.
[264] *Daily Telegraph,* 2 May 1992.
[265] *The Guardian*, 30 June 1992.
[266] Controller, Radio 3, 1992-2007.

intervention and one to which the BBC eventually relented. This proved the Radio 4 audience felt it had a degree of ownership of its station so it was no surprise that a number of minor schedule changes would provoke a similar outcry. These included the moving of *Woman's Hour* from an afternoon slot to a morning slot in September 1991 and the failure of *Anderson Country* in 1994. The uproar surrounding these relatively minor changes caught the BBC off guard which Hendy (2007, p299) explains as being due to the fact that Radio 4 was simply acting as a surrogate for all sorts of wider, deeper disgruntlements regarding questions of permissiveness and political bias:

> In the 1980s and 1990s, these two issues retained their power to offend, and were joined by other, newer concerns – over mediocrity, blandness, superficiality, folksiness, rudeness, aggressiveness, political correctness. Some of these would later be grouped together and labelled 'dumbing down'.

Whether the commercial sector had any role in this process of 'dumbing down', Hendy does not speculate but it may be reasonable to suggest that during the early 1990s a greater degree of permissiveness had permeated the entire radio spectrum as well as television, thus shifting both media out of the private, domestic realm[267] as had been its considered place and instead into the public sphere[268] (Kay and Mendes 2015, p127).

A very significant development in this period was the appointment of John Birt as Director General in 1992.[269] Birt had already been acting as Deputy Director General since 1987 and his first impressions were that there were many problems at the core of the organisation:

> The centre of the BBC seemed stuck in the 1950s… It was quickly apparent that this bloated, bureaucratic monolith was wasting licence-payers' funds on a massive scale (Birt 2002, pp248-251).

Birt's response on becoming Director General was to introduce measures to promote economic efficiency across the organisation. Coming from the commercial television

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[267] Typified as addressing a multi-generational audience in the context of the home.
[268] Described as being consumed by all citizens in the public realm.
[269] BBC Director General 1992-2000.

sector[270] he was struck by what he saw as major inefficiencies which he was determined to address but he was also under pressure from the Conservative government of the time as the BBC's Charter was up for renewal in 1996. Birt's response was the introduction of Producer Choice in April 1993 – an internal market system requiring BBC producers to buy services from in-house departments or outside suppliers with the aim of promoting efficiency and cutting waste, thus bringing market principles into the internal running of the BBC[271] but this change programme ceased by 1994 without realising its full intentions. Birt was often criticised for using management consultants to formulate his policy with critics sceptical about their understanding of how a large creative organisation like the BBC works but this overlooks the fact that the very same consultants, McKinsey, were also employed a quarter of a century earlier to achieve improved resource allocation in the reforms of 1967-1972 (Wegg-Prosser 2001). Stoller (2010, p244) claims that at this time while massive change was under way in the BBC, 'radio was treated as being desperately old fashioned.' In fact the opposite seems to be the case according to Birt who described the state of the radio networks at the time as 'in altogether better shape than BBC television' (Birt 2002, p380).

For the BBC the years of the early 1990s were characterised by the fight to keep its national radio portfolio out of danger which meant a lot of change in terms of personalities and content. In many ways the BBC created an internal battleground. Rather than tackling its commercial rivals it seemed to be creating in-house disputes whether with its very core audience over change of programming, or among its own management over change of philosophy, or indeed with its talent as was seen when Classic FM managed to steal five of the biggest names from the Radio 4 programme *Gardeners' Question Time.*[272] Talent also became an issue between BBC stations themselves as different networks competed for various presenters. This was most apparent when Danny Baker walked out of his job at Radio 5 to accept a position at Radio 1 much to the fury of Radio 5 management. The creation of an internal market had internalised competition so that the BBC was competing with external forces and oddly competing with itself.

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[270] Previously Director of Programmes at London Weekend Television (LWT).
[271] For more detailed analyses of Producer Choice see McDonald (1995), Felix (2000) and Wegg-Prosser (2001).
[272] Gardeners' Defection Time, *The Times,* 10 February 1994.

It would appear that this period in British radio history was one that worked very much in favour of the commercial sector. It marks a culmination of the process that started at Heathrow which, with the assistance of legislation in the form of the 1990 Broadcasting Act, the expansion of ILR and the successful introduction of INR, meant that the commercial sector had rid itself of the constraints of independent radio and finally become truly commercial.

While the Reithian approach to broadcasting had been weakened by the commercial sector and the Conservative government of the day it obviously remained a central tenet for the BBC as part of its role to promote a PSB ethos. Within the BBC however this philosophy, while remaining intact, had to work in tandem with another eponymous philosophy, namely Birtism. The BBC now had to apply market principles to its everyday working in order to achieve the efficiencies required for it to compete with an expanding and ever more resilient commercial sector.

The relationship between the BBC and the commercial sector remained strained during this period. There was little in the way of cooperation over issues beneficial to both parties and one can argue that the issues surrounding Radio 1 and the commercial sector's intensified desire to compete with it on a local and national level represented a nadir in relations. Many of the disputes between both groups had often been based on the citing of conflicting audience figures as each used separate measurement systems so there was in reality no easy method of comparison or indeed authentication. This was resolved in a major act of cooperation in 1992 with the establishment of a body called Radio Joint Audience Research (RAJAR) to operate a single audience measurement system for the whole British radio industry.[273] The reason both systems had been difficult to compare was because of the existence of two very different research methodologies with the BBC requiring data for programme evaluation and the commercial sector using its data primarily as a trading currency with advertisers and other investors (Robinson 2000). Although the two methodologies often produced similar results it was the intensity of competition between the two that necessitated a single joint service (Robinson ibid). Of course the model is not perfect and since the

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[273] Before this the BBC did its own research while the commercial sector employed the Joint Industry Committee for Radio Audience Research (JICRAR).

formation of RAJAR the industry has on numerous occasions been critical of measurement techniques fearing that if not robust, they may damage radio's credibility among advertisers, regulators and audiences (Starkey 2002).

Street (2002, p130) says of this period that the 'very sound of commercial radio changed.' Gone was the meaningful speech of the 1970s and 1980s. Instead there was a proliferation of automated playout systems, groups of stations playing the same output leading to what he calls a 'unity of sound' across the commercial network. Street (ibid) also describes a 'unity of branding' which forced some radio critics to lament a 'sameness' of output which turned radio into a branded product rather than a service, but branding was also becoming a cornerstone of BBC radio as much as the commercial sector. It could be argued that the sound of BBC radio also changed, particularly that of Radio 1 and it did so in a way to emulate the very sound of commercial radio (Hendy 2000a). The question is, did the audience really mind or was this exactly what they wanted? It would seem it was exactly what they wanted as between 1992-1995 revenue from advertising in the commercial radio sector almost doubled from £141m to £270m and more importantly by 1995 commercial radio's audience share overtook that of the BBC for the first time ever (Street ibid, p131).

The next major change in the radio world would not come directly in the form of sound or of new competitive forces but would come in the area of technology. As the 1990s got under way a new form of radio technology was coming through its experimental process and preparing to enter the mainstream. Section 1 has illustrated the historical degree of divergence which existed within the UK radio industry and how this was largely untouched by the arrival of legalised competition to the BBC. It has also shown the impact competition has had on the BBC and how commercial radio has played an important role in the development of radio as a medium. In Section 2 I intend to describe how the BBC and the commercial sector worked individually and then in unison on order to promote DAB digital radio in the UK and ensure the ultimate survival of the radio industry itself.

SECTION 2

THE BBC AND THE COMMERCIAL RADIO SECTOR: THE DAB ERA

1985 - 2003

Having considered the historical relationship between the BBC and the commercial radio sector throughout Section 1, the continuing relationship in the age of digital radio now forms the basis of Section 2. The aim of this section is to further scrutinize this relationship in an attempt to analyse the dynamics involved and ultimately describe its nature and extent. The intention is to ascertain if the arrival of a new technology of radio, in the shape of digital broadcasting, altered that relationship in any tangible way and if so, the reasons for such a shift.

Chapter 4 begins with the question 'what is digital radio?' The answer to this question comes in two forms; firstly, the technology, and secondly, the semantics. In technological terms an analysis is required in order to highlight the attributes of the new application as a method of determining its advantage or otherwise and also in order to explain why the thesis focuses particularly on the model of DAB and not other methods of digital transmission and reception. In semiological terms the notion of 'digital radio' requires definition vis-à-vis concurrent or erstwhile radio technologies in order to promote accuracy as to the model under scrutiny. Following on from this, it seems pertinent to account for the factors that influenced or drove digital radio in the UK. As well as the BBC and the commercial radio sector, other forces are apparent in the move towards digital radio in Britain. Hence an analysis of the political, economic and institutional undercurrents can prove useful in constructing a study of the new technology's foundations in Britain.

Chapter 5 examines the case of the BBC and digital radio - the organisation's motivation to embrace the new platform and its subsequent journey to implement it. It will be interesting to note the factors of influence and the BBC's perceptions of the new technology as well as the steps it pursued in order to fulfil its own ambitions and whether these actions represented any change to its status within British broadcasting. Similarly, Chapter 6 considers the same series of fundamental questions but in this case in relation to the commercial radio sector over the same period.

Chapter 4

Digital Radio in the UK

Defining Digital Radio

Digital radio in its broadest sense encapsulates a number of different platforms which nevertheless conform to a single technology. In essence, an existing analogue audio signal is digitized and compressed and then transmitted using digital modulation (Lax 2009, p104). Digital radio forms only a part of the world of 'digital communication systems and devices which pervade modern life' (Creeber and Martin 2009) and include among others, television, internet and mobile technology. Digitalization in radio originated in the production process with the change from conventional analogue audio tape to digital recording on magnetic tape or hard disc, digital signal processing in studio mixing desks and finally digital transmission (Hoeg and Lauterbach 2009, p2). At the same time as a plethora of hard disc digital distribution and storage media emerged such as CD, Minidisc, DAT and DVD, these were soon followed by streaming or download formats such as MP3 (Maes and Vercammen 2001), thus the digitalization of radio followed a similar path to other media in the early days of the nascent technology. For some commentators the term digital radio encompasses both digital production and digital distribution (Hendy 2000a) but for the purpose of this research I wish to ignore the notion of the 'digitalization of radio' which I use as an umbrella term to cover all aspects of the radio process and instead concentrate on the term 'digital radio' which is the area of study in this instance – namely the distribution and reception of the broadcast radio signal.

Digital radio broadcasting differs from AM and FM by bundling radio channels into multiplexes and by the use of digital encoding to maximise the use of bandwith available (Starkey 2008). Limits to the expansion of radio services in their analogue form have been set by a scarcity of space on the electromagnetic spectrum which is easily rectified by DAB which can squeeze six or seven full scale services into the space currently occupied by just one. In the digital system an analogue audio signal is digitized, compressed using formats such as MP2,[274] and transmitted using a digital modulation scheme which essentially transfers a digital bit stream over an analogue channel. By encoding a series of ones and zeros[275] on radio waves themselves, a much more powerful signal can be generated and with such a signal, the wave can carry much more information. The effect of this is to bestow on the digital signal a number of

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[274] An audio compression format.

[275] This binary system is the basis of all digital broadcasting. See Watkinson (2002).

significant advantages over analogue and particularly FM. These include: a greater listening choice through the potential of delivering a greater number of stations; a clearer digital sound quality through the reduction of hiss and crackle and an addition of data services meaning text and other data appendages can be carried alongside the audio signal. As well as these umbrella characteristics there can be extra benefits for listener or user experience derived from additional features including ease of finding stations at the touch of a button and the ability to pause and rewind live radio.[276]

Although the technology of digital radio is easily defined, the term 'digital radio' nevertheless still presents a challenge in terms of definition, given that often different descriptions of means of reception are employed loosely or even interchangeably. Thus we find specific terms such as, listening via digital television and internet radio (Coyle 2006). For purposes of clarity, it is important to spell out the focus of this section in terms of what is digital radio. As already noted, I have distinguished between 'digitalization' or the entire process of production and distribution, and 'digital radio' which centres on the broadcast and reception elements. But even this now requires further clarification in order to ensure that it is a specific method of reception or listening that is the subject of examination, so in this case DAB.

There are inherent problems of defining radio in the digital age which requires more in-depth interpretation than the traditional definitions that characterise studies of the analogue era and which concentrate on generalised traits such as radio's blind nature and its use of codes (Crisell 1994, p3). Of course these key traits still form the basis of radio as an experience and could equally apply to other modes of listening, but each mode equally requires its own description in order to highlight its differences to DAB. Listening via digital television (DTV) follows the same broadcast principles as apply to DAB whereby a signal is received in a digital format. Although television transmissions contain a lot more information than radio transmissions simply due to the fact the signal contains video (Lundstrom 2006, p19), a transmission of a digitalized radio signal to a television receptor can use the same amount of information as if it was being sent to a DAB set with the same audio signal and supporting data package. Indeed many broadcasters supply the exact same amount of audio and data for different platforms.

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[276] All these attributes are highlighted by both the BBC:
http://www.ukdigitalradio.com/advice/thebasics/ and the commercial radio sector:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/reception/radio/digitalradio/

Delivered via satellite, cable or terrestrially, DTV carries the same content and creates the same audience effect as DAB although naturally lacking in the elements of portability or ubiquity which characterise radio in the modern age as a result of the introduction of the transistor in the 1950s and which represented a 'liberating, modern lifestyle accessory offering music on the move both inside and outside the home' (Lax 2009, p48).

Digital Radio Mondiale (DRM)[277] is similarly a digital audio broadcasting technology but one designed to work over the bands already employed for AM broadcasting, particularly the shortwave (SW) band. As well as carrying audio and data digital broadcasts on AM it is deemed comparable to FM mono in terms of sound quality and can be broadcast with a footprint of 1000 miles from a single transmitter (Varrall 2012, p277). This ability to transmit over long distances has meant it holds a certain allure for broadcasters with global audiences such as Radio France Internationale, Deutsche Welle, Voice of America and BBC World Service, whose programming content has been delivered by the Digital Radio Mondiale Consortium, an organisation which has been responsible for designing and implementing the platform (Anderson 2014, p165). However for certain global broadcasters, the response to DRM was not altogether positive with failings of the strength of signal outside Europe cited as a prominent reason (Kleinsteuber 2011, p71). For the BBC World Service, DRM was to lose currency in favour of existing analogue technology by 2008:

> Short Wave remains a key method of delivery in less developed parts
> of the world where other means of access are not readily available…
> Digital short wave took a significant step forward… Nevertheless, the
> future of BBC World Service is increasingly focused on FM, and increasing
> its availability where possible.[278]

Satellite radio[279] is yet another form of digital radio distribution which is broadcast from satellites to a much wider geographical area than terrestrial radio stations. The model was pioneered in the USA by two companies, XM, which launched in September 2001 and Sirius, which launched in July 2002. These services were available via a

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[277] See Beutler (2008, p42).
[278] Foreign Affairs Committee: The Work of the BBC World Service 2008-09. 5 February 2010. HC334. London, HMSO.
[279] See Sadiku (2006, p116).

subscription service only, which in itself represented a substantial change to the traditional radio broadcasting model as much as the technology itself. The result is that the output of the stations provided by XM and Sirius were largely free of commercials and subscribers were also offered many more stations and a wider variety of programming options than existed on terrestrial radio. Satellite radio has been quite successful in the USA with XM having almost 8 million subscribers by the end of 2006 and Sirius having just over 6 million and these figures represent mostly in-car consumption (Pavlik 2008, p61). In July 2008, XM and Sirius merged to form Sirius XM Radio and began broadcasting their combined channel line-ups thus becoming a huge force in US radio which could claim over 25 million subscribers by the end of 2013.[280] The merger also ensured the survival of satellite radio in the US although it was to be a model which would not find equal currency in other parts of the globe with the exception of a similar digital satellite radio project called Worldspace which attempted to provide audio, data and multimedia services across Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia before ceasing operations in 2009 (Maxson 2007, p27).

For commentators, internet radio represents the greatest challenge in terms of reconciling analogue and digital radio on a theoretical level. Writing at a time when radio on the web was still very much in its infancy, Priestman (2002, p1) highlights a number of pertinent factors which still apply when considering its unique attributes. These include: its detachment from the established radio industry; the evolving simplified technology which permits non industry actors to participate; its ability to co-exist alongside analogue radio; its audience potential which does not conform to existing radio models and how it fits conveniently with the social drift towards niche markets and smaller audiences.

Probably the greatest impact of internet radio is in the area of how we listen, particularly through the introduction of time-shift listening and podcasting. Time-shift listening refers to the listening to a broadcast at a time later than when it was originally broadcast and while it has been a feature of viewing since the arrival of video cassette recorders in the 1980s, it now forms a common part of the 'general cultural experience of listening' (Wilby and Conroy 1994, p31) as well through programme downloads which now form an important part of the offering of most established radio stations.

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[280] Sirius XM, Press Release, 7 January 2014.
http://investor.siriusxm.com/releasedetail.cfm?ReleaseID=817666

Podcasting refers to the process of 'producing, and uploading on to the internet, audio files to be heard using MP3 players' (Chignell 2009, p41) and came about as a result of the creation of the MP3 audio file technology which made it possible to download and transfer sound files from the internet thus impacting on radio's 'linearity'.[281] MP3 may be seen as a simple codec for compressing the size of audio files for digital distribution but as Hacker (2000, p1) notes it is much more than this:

> MP3 is nothing less than a cultural and economic revolution on the
> internet. Every day, hundreds of thousands of MP3 files are searched for,
> shared, recorded and listened to by computer and internet users of all
> kinds.

The internet has changed how we perceive the traditional notion of radio with platforms such as podcasting now playing an increasingly important role in audio production, distribution and consumption. Podcasting allows anyone with a computer to create and freely distribute their own distinctive and unregulated programming across the globe and as Berry (2006) points out, by distribution through iPods and similar MP3 players, also surmounts those key obstacles which impeded the growth of internet radio, namely its portability, intimacy and accessibility:

> This is a scenario where audiences are producers, where the technology
> we already have assumes new roles and where audiences, cut off from
> traditional media, rediscover their voices.

Black (2001) challenges the very term internet radio by posing a number of apposite questions in relation to the concept. Thus he suggests we need to query:

> Why should an audio signal delivered through the internet be called
> 'radio' in the first place? Is it self-evident that making money from
> the delivery of such signals has anything to do with radio? Do listeners
> to internet audio streams count as radio listeners? Or is 'internet radio'
> a different medium from 'radio' and, if so, why has it borrowed the name.

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[281] Neumark (2006) offers an interesting analysis of the concept of radio's 'linearity' or the relationship between time and the activity of listening and how timeshift audio consumption alters the experience.

Which comes first, the name or the medium? Indeed, whose idea was it to call it that?

Black's insecurity reflects the concern at his time of writing that internet radio would evolve into something which was not intrinsically radio. Writing eight years later Chignell (2009, p42) felt there was 'something profoundly unradio-like' regarding descriptions of podcast listening which eschewed the orthodox definition of radio listening as a 'profoundly social act' but does this notion of what Lacey (2013, p113) calls the continued 'privatisation of the listening public' really not sit comfortably within what we term 'radio'? In fact it would appear that it can, as was proven by a simple exercise in nomenclature at the BBC. In 2006 Jenny Abramsky's[282] job title changed from Director of Radio to Director of Audio and Music precisely to reflect the addition of online services, audio on demand and podcasting to her remit of broadcast radio thus employing audio as a term that would effectively include the traditional definition of radio with emerging methods of audio distribution. However, by 2013 when Helen Boaden[283] took over the position from Tim Davie[284] she was to take over a division renamed BBC Radio[285] which suggests that within the BBC the term 'radio' had overcome the threats to its identity and was still the term familiar to listeners no matter how they actually listened.

It would appear that the traditional notion of radio has managed to successfully survive both as a point of reference but also in economic terms. Radio on the internet is characterised by the emergence of new entrants with new forms of funding and who have the ability to provide content relatively cheaply and gives a much lower economic advantage to stations which might have large listenerships but as Wall (2004) argues there would be challenges to any idealist view that:

The internet could be a cultural space in which new ideas about broadcasting could flourish away from the restrictions of the state and from market-driven mass entertainment.

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[282] BBC Director of Radio 1999-2006, BBC Director of Audio & Music 2006-2008.
[283] BBC Director of Radio 2013-present.
[284] BBC Director of Audio & Music 2008-2013.
[285] BBC Press Release 14 February 2013
http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2013/tony-hall-senior-team.html

Of course a different conceptual approach to radio in the digital domain is considered requisite by those who argue that:

> After digitalisation the relationship to earlier analogue forms is so distant that the use of the term 'radio' to describe the new medium is called into question (Dubber 2013, p40).

Dubber (ibid, p130) goes on to claim that the devices through which we listen to radio programming, i.e. the modes of reception, have massively diversified and the platforms through which we consume digital radio ranges from telephones to televisions to desktop computers to tablets. This thesis concentrates on one particular platform, namely DAB radio, which is the closest link to the traditional mode of radio listening and complies with the all the attributes of other digital platforms but unlike the others, continues an important linkage with radio's inherent portability which for example is absent in the case of digital television or internet radio even when connected by wi-fi. It is this notion of 'multi-location reception' (Lax et al 2008) or what Crisell (1994, p11) describes perhaps more aptly as 'flexibility' which sets DAB apart from other platforms and which makes it more akin to the analogue model.

As Hoeg and Lauterbach (2009, p1) note DAB itself was developed into a DAB system family comprising DAB as well as DAB+ which is an extended DAB system for newer audio coding schemes, and DMB (Digital Multimedia Broadcasting) systems which as the name suggests carry more than DAB's audio and additional data enhancements, but for this thesis DAB forms the basis of study and the one which originated under the Eureka 147 project.

The Road to DAB in the UK

If there existed a number of different, emergent digital platforms for radio one can then ask why DAB gained ascendancy? DAB as a technology was originally developed in 1981 at the Institut für Rundfunktechnik in Munich (McCauley 2002, p598), a research centre run by a number of German, Austrian and Swiss broadcasters aspiring to achieve a degree of standardisation of broadcasting technology and whose work has 'played a

decisive role in developing the digital standard DAB'[286] and it was this enterprise which would go on to form the basis for the Eureka 147 research project. The oddly titled Eureka 147 project has quite an unostentatious meaning, it signifies the 147th project of the Eureka project established by a Conference of Ministers of 17 countries and members of the Commission of the European Community (EC) which describes itself as:

> An intergovernmental organisation for market driven R&D…
> facilitating the coordination of national funding on innovation
> aiming to boost the productivity and competitiveness of
> European industries.[287]

The 147th project, which began in January 1987 had as its aim the 'development of a European technical standard for digital audio broadcasting'[288] hence the unequivocal driving force was to provide a new and distinct impetus for the European consumer electronics industry and those spearheading the advance included a number of European broadcasters (including the BBC), as a well as some equipment manufacturers, car makers and transmission companies and was supported by the EBU. O'Neill and Shaw (2010, p36) claim that:

> The guiding assumptions underpinning the development of Eureka 147
> DAB were that a robust and mature technology developed within Europe's
> highly regarded high technology research environment would provide an
> ideal replacement standard for the broadcasting industry.

But this interpretation may be over generous towards the ambitions for broadcasting. It may be more appropriate to say at this point, in the late 1980s, that the bedrock of the Eureka 147 project was the desire to boost the competitive edge of the European electronics industry by placing Europe at the vanguard of the digitalization of radio 'through the development of its own particular broadcast model' (Lax 2003). Stoller (2012, p149) asserts that the main motivation for the BBC, as the sole UK member of the consortium, was 'the hunger among British broadcasters for more spectrum in an increasingly crowded market place' but whatever the BBC's incentive at this time there

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[286] Institut für Rundfunktechnik http://www.irt.de/en/
[287] Eureka http://www.eurekanetwork.org/about
[288] Eureka ibid.

remains no doubt that the origins of the pan-European drive towards DAB are couched in a desire to:

> Stimulate a virtually saturated market with new products for car and domestic audio broadcasting units… this will encourage considerable innovation from European microelectronics manufacturers… will provide a long term counterbalance to the increasing dominance of the countries of the far east in the consumer investment goods industries.[289]

Far from being a project to ameliorate the experience of radio listeners or ensure the long term survival of radio broadcasters, it would appear the nascent stage of the digitalization of radio in Europe, as a policy objective at least, was geared instead towards the betterment of the consumer electronics industry. Of course this was an industry which throughout Europe had found itself in a weakened position largely as a result of competition from Asia and it was thought a coordinated European DAB project, as developed through the Eureka 147 initiative, could very possibly halt this decline (Lembke 2002, p262). Thus began the international process of promoting DAB across Europe. The European DAB Forum was formed in 1995[290] with this aim and one estimate suggests €500 million had been spent on DAB development in Europe by 1999 (Ala-Fossi 2010, p49).

Before going on to study in-depth the role played by the BBC and the commercial radio sector in promoting DAB in the UK it is useful to examine the consolidation of DAB as a core strategic policy for British radio both at corporate and governmental levels. Digitalization of radio arrived on the radio horizon at the same time as the UK radio industry was going through enormous change in terms of its structure and position within the media environment. The end of the BBC monopoly at a local level had been well established since the 1970s and a challenge to its hegemony at a national level coincided with the emergence of the DAB standard across Europe as a result of the Eureka 147 initiative. What one can conclude therefore is that the timing was either to act as a saviour for the changing radio landscape or an even greater challenge. Lax et al (2008) argue the continuing growth of commercial radio in the UK, particularly in the early 1990s, brought with it an increasingly limited availability of the FM spectrum

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[289] Eureka Project Form, 17 December 1986, cited in Rudin (2006).
[290] Renamed the World DAB Forum in 1997 and later the World DMB Forum in 2006.

which meant that the commercial sector could only anticipate future incremental growth of analogue radio thus curtailing its expansive aspirations. Also, with the BBC having a leading role in the Eureka 147 project, so much so that it 'carried great influence within the EBU regarding the new technology' (Stoller 2012), the future for DAB seemed propitious. In fact when it was first introduced there was a general feeling among most broadcasters and the EBU that it 'would replace FM in a short and smooth transition' (Ala-Fossi et al 2008).

BBC Radio had been trying hard to get the public to embrace FM since the late 1970s and by the early 1990s was working towards FM platforms for Radio 1, Radio 2, Radio 3 and most controversially, Radio 4 (Hendy 2007, p351). It was believed that the apparent consumer resistance to FM was due to the absence of any great incentive to use it despite the fact that FM receivers had managed to achieve reasonable market penetration, indeed it was thought that by 1983, 85% of households had a set and 29% of cars were equipped as well.[291] It would appear that the market potential existed and simply had to be tapped into through the provision of a wider FM service. Alas the transition to complete FM broadcasting would soon be overtaken by a thrusting policy of DAB promotion instead.

Steps towards DAB continued with the setting up of the UK DAB Forum in 1993, announced by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)[292] and confirmed that DAB was now the preferred technical choice of the government for the future of radio broadcasting. The UK DAB Forum was largely dominated by technical and administrative personnel from the DTI and the BBC and its remit was essentially the all-out promotion of DAB among consumers, not just consumers in terms of consumers of audio, i.e. listeners, but also consumers in the sense of potential purchasers of required receiving sets, without whom the project would be doomed to long term failure. Rudin (2006) argues that throughout any discussions in the early stages of DAB in the UK there had been absolutely no discussion in the public sphere regarding the form and configuration of the new system and by the time the UK DAB Forum was established it had already been decided, by political and broadcasting elites, how the system would be used. As far as content was concerned, at this early point digital

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[291] Green Paper. Radio: Choices and Opportunities. February 1987. Cm 92. London, HMSO.
[292] National Forum to be Established to Promote Digital Audio Broadcasting. Department of Trade and Industry Press Release, 16 February 1993.

broadcasting was envisaged more as a complimentary platform to analogue and not perceived as a replacement in the same way digital television was perceived (Rudin ibid). This supports the argument that DAB in Britain was initially largely implemented directly as a result of European integration. It also proves that the commercial sector had only at this point become more involved in the road to DAB, if one assumes the BBC held the only position as a broadcasting elite in the UK. So if one is trying to gauge any degree of cooperation it is surely absent at the early discussion stage and only becomes evident at this later point with the formation of the UK DAB Forum when the AIRC was:

> invited to join at a slightly later stage , certainly after the BBC…
> whereas national state/public service broadcasters were involved
> in the initial policy discussions, only when the essentials of the
> system had been agreed were commercial and local broadcasters
> invited to participate (Rudin ibid).

Beyond even the BBC and the commercial sector, there is absolutely no discernible consumer element to policy decisions at this stage. Stoller (2012) believes all decisions were aimed simply at 'facilitating the demands of UK radio industry and given credence by the government.' He goes on to claim that the consumer or listener aspects were in fact overlooked until as late as 2010 but I believe this overlooks the evident inclusion of the consumer/audience dimension which accompanied the BBC's decision to launch new services from 2000 onwards.

In 1995 the government published a white paper 'Digital Terrestrial Broadcasting, The Government's Proposals'[293] which eventually would lead to the 1996 Broadcasting Act.[294] In the debate on the bill as it passed through Parliament Virginia Bottomley, the Secretary of State for National Heritage, told the House of Lords:

> We stand on the verge of a new broadcasting revolution even
> more significant than the change from black and white to colour

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[293] Digital Terrestrial Broadcasting, The Government's Proposals, 19 September 1995. Cm: 2946.
[294] Broadcasting Act, 1996. London, HMSO.

television.[295]

It could be argued from this synopsis that the government merely thought of digital radio as a bolt on to the wider picture of digitalization, playing a minor role to that of television and perhaps that the legislation which introduced DAB to UK was not driven by any great enthusiasm for the new technology. But the final Act itself does not by any means merely consider radio in passing but provides for it similar weight as it does for television. It outlines provisions for licences and the operation of multiplexes and provided a very attractive incentive for commercial stations to embrace digital. It allowed for one national digital multiplex to be operated by BBC and one by the commercial sector as well as 26 local and regional multiplexes. The INR stations would be guaranteed a presence on a national multiplex and more importantly any ILR station which agreed to broadcast on a local multiplex would get an automatic 8 year extension to its analogue licence.[296] This was an enormously generous inducement for the commercial broadcasters to step on to the digital bandwagon as at this point a guaranteed continuation of their analogue presence would have been seen as their main raison d'etre. If any commercial company was initially sceptical of digital it could not resist such an offer but Stoller (2010, p280) is very critical of the government's actions in this regard:

> The idea of effectively incentivising the radio companies to join DAB…
> effectively locked in the major radio companies to apply for DAB licences…
> it also forced the entire industry to become supporters of DAB, when some
> commercial scepticism would have been useful.

The Act made little provision regarding content and left regulation of this aspect to the owners of the multiplex licences who were able to simply simulcast existing services thus giving real power to the established main commercial players at the detriment of smaller players. But this again provided further incentive for the commercial sector now tantalised by the double headed enticement of automatic extension of existing analogue licences and the absence of strict content regulation. Rudin (2006) argues these factors:

> amounted to very generous concessions and resulted in further

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[295] Hansard: House of Lords 16 April 1996. Vol 275 cc537-614.
[296] Broadcasting Act, 1996. London, HMSO.

consolidation of an already rapidly consolidating commercial

radio system.

From this one can conclude that the 1996 Broadcasting Act provided impetus for greater fortification of the position of the commercial sector, although perhaps to the advantage of the bigger commercial companies and to the disadvantage of smaller local commercial operatives. Nevertheless the Act certainly brought the commercial sector into the DAB arena and largely because the commercial companies could envisage the benefits, as Lax (2007, p109) concludes:

It would appear the UK government in its desire to secure the

the growth of digital radio needed to encourage the commercial

sector to participate and offering inducement allowed that sector

to expand and strengthen its position particularly against the BBC.

However, the effect of this new found boost in self confidence from within the commercial sector was to spur the BBC into even greater action and this too resulted from the provisions of the 1996 Broadcasting Act. Although having run a DAB experimental service since 1993 the Act now granted the BBC spectrum to operate a national multiplex to simulcast its existing national networks[297] and as Starkey (2008) observes the BBC probably felt 'it could not afford to be left behind at this crucial point in digital radio history in the UK.'

The UK DAB model complies with the general European model whereby the commercial sector is enticed to become involved following the initial efforts of national public service broadcasters. It is also interesting to note that neither the BBC nor the commercial sector were encouraged to act through the threat of any analogue switch-off as none existed but rather the motivation appeared to be the potential threat from each other. The 1996 Broadcasting Act therefore signifies a crucial point in the history of digital radio in the UK and in terms of the status of the BBC and the commercial sector, it can be argued that it conferred upon the commercial sector a significant role. The multiplex operating licences were awarded to the big commercial companies which gave them a huge presence on the radio landscape particularly at the national level where there would be space for as many commercial stations as public service stations.

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[297] Broadcasting Act, 1996. London, HMSO.

Lax et al (2008) argue that the case of the UK illustrates well this form of enticement of commercial radio:

> The control of the multiplexes by the large radio groups coupled with a relaxed regulatory regime would help give these groups a competitive advantage. The inclusion of a further particular incentive, the automatic renewal of existing analogue licences, finally persuaded commercial radio companies to risk the investment in DAB.

One could argue that allowing the commercial sector to operate its own national multiplex now notionally placed it on an equal footing with the BBC.

The drive to promote digital radio continued in Britain and Europe though the late 1990s. In 1998 the EC organised a conference in Brussels called *Radio in the Digital Era*[298] bringing together broadcasters, receiver manufacturers and politicians with the aim of consolidating even further European wide efforts to promote DAB with the primary objective of rescuing European competitiveness in the consumer electronics market (Rudin 2006, O'Neill 2009). This conference highlights two critical points regarding DAB in Europe, namely that 11 years after the initial Eureka 147 launch it still had not taken off and therefore required a further round of attempted proselytising and secondly, for the EC, DAB was considered more as a product than a service. It is therefore tempting to suggest that by the late 1990s the DAB route in the Europe was diverging from that in the UK where the effect on broadcasting, and more particularly the business of broadcasting, carried greater weight thus providing an entirely different DAB dynamic for British broadcasters as opposed to policy makers.

At a policy making level in the UK the initial objective was the same as that across the EC i.e. geared towards productivity rather than the listening experience. The Conservative government embarked upon the path of creating the necessary legislation to furnish digital radio in Britain believing that it would bring a worthwhile market stimulus (Levy 1999) and the Labour government which came to power in 1997 placed great emphasis on the creative industries which would supply the new technology (Hewison, 2014) estimating that television and radio accounted for revenues of £6.4

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[298] Radio in the Digital Era: A Report on the Meeting Organised by the European Commission, 5 March, 1998. Brussels, CEC (DG X).

billion and employed 63,500 people by 1998.[299] Within this it was thought commercial radio was well placed as a wealth creator; not only that but also as a promoter of initiatives that improve quality of life for citizens; in fact one report suggested commercial radio was 'invariably more successful than BBC national and local radio in reflecting listener concerns and lifestyles,'[300] hence its support was deemed crucial.

Beyond the 1990s further important legislative assistance was provided to aid the uptake of DAB. The 2003 Communications Act saw the introduction of a new super regulator, the Office of Communications (OFCOM), replacing the Radio Authority and this new regulator set out to once again give DAB yet another push in attempt to drive it forward. OFCOM's new chief executive, Stephen Carter,[301] even went so far as to say DAB had already 'been around too long without making any sort of significant breakthrough' (Stoller 2012). The result of this strategy was the publication of *Radio – Preparing for the Future*[302] which clearly spelt out that digital radio could still offer benefits to broadcasters and listeners alike. The Digital Radio Working Group was established in November 2007 by Department for Culture, Media and Sport to:

> bring together senior figures from the radio industry and related
> stakeholders… to consider three questions: what conditions would need
> to be achieved before digital platforms could become the predominant
> means of delivering radio? What are the current barriers to the growth of
> digital radio? What are the possible remedies to those barriers?[303]

In 2009 the government published its report 'Digital Britain'[304] which stated:

> the biggest barrier to radio's digital future is a lack of clarity and
> commitment to the DAB platform… Government has a pivotal role
> in securing this certainty.

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[299] Department for Culture, Media & Sport 1998: Creative Industries Mapping Document. London, HMSO.

[300] Henley Centre: Media Futures 1993. London, Henley Centre. Cited in Irvine (2000).

[301] Stephen Carter, Baron Carter of Barnes. OFCOM Chief Executive, 2003-2007.

[302] Radio – Preparing for the Future. December 2004. OFCOM. http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/radio_review/

[303] Digital Radio Working Group. Interim Report for the Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport. June 2008. http://onegoldensquare.com/pdfs/drwg.pdf

[304] Digital Britain. Final Report. June 2009. Department for Culture, Media & Sport. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/228844/7650.pdf

However, part of the process of securing this certainty was to introduce an uncertainty by proposing an aspirational analogue switch-off date of 2015 which now seems unlikely to happen.

Over the period of 28 years since the inception of the Eureka 147 project, DAB is still oddly at its early stages. All the steps made by broadcasters and policy makers to promote it have not seen the success the initiators had hoped for and it has indeed been a long gestation period for a new technology, yet one that has not been abandoned despite the fact that older technologies such the internet or even newer technologies such as 4G[305] could be seen as potential growth areas for radio. Even DAB is being overtaken by itself in the form of DAB+ or DMB, but in Britain DAB remains the primary target for broadcasters and policy makers alike. If radio elites in Britain are still hopeful for DAB's long term success one has to ask why it still has not happened or more aptly, what are the problems with DAB?

Problems with DAB

Although DAB became the standard for Europe and a policy direction for the UK and an objective for the UK radio industry, it has not been without its detractors nor was the view that is was technically superior to the existing analogue service a unanimous verdict.

It is not unfair to argue there are problems with DAB technology itself, particularly when it has been sold with the main proposition of offering much improved sound quality. This message has failed to convince for many analysts and listeners due to the existence of gaps in transmission coverage causing loss of signal, particularly for in-car reception. This is a significant downfall for a service that promised sound quality of a higher level than FM and indeed it is the now well established appraisal of FM broadcasts which highlight DAB's inadequacy in this area even more (Starkey 2008). Ala-Fossi (2010) paints a bleak picture for DAB by claiming its audio coding has been considered 'inefficient and outdated since around 2005' when new systems such as

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[305] Fourth generation of mobile telecommunications technology.

Digital Video Broadcasting (DVB)[306] possessing more efficient audio coding were able to deliver higher quality sound and more extra services. Indeed a core problem with DAB would appear to be that it uses a 'twentieth century technology that has already been surpassed' (Starkey 2008).

Another failure of DAB is its lack of universality. It is easy to highlight the fact that by 2005, 28 countries had employed DAB, not just in Europe but also Canada, Australia, China and South Africa (Lax et al 2008) yet even as the Eureka 147 project was selecting DAB as the standard for Europe many were frustrated and disappointed by the reluctance of the USA and Japan to adopt a similar standard which meant that Europe's DAB platform had lost its global appeal for receiver manufacturers who would be hesitant to produce a product without universal market potential as had been the case with AM and FM radio.

For the broadcaster DAB also brings with it some drawbacks. It requires conversion of its transmitter network in order to transmit digital alongside existing analogue services which entails significant capital investment. For the commercial sector transmission costs for DAB were estimated to be in the figure of £35 million[307] meaning that DAB at this stage was 'only affordable by the largest commercial operators' (Hendy 2000a, p54) thus leading to the buttressing of a small elite within the commercial sector itself. A financial outlay becomes much riskier when coupled with another trait of DAB namely, the possibility of increased competition resulting from the fact that DAB brings with it the greater scope for multiplexes to carry significantly more channels. Allocating a DAB multiplex to a particular area for example creates the capacity for at least 10 services, which does not create problems for a national multiplex, as these spaces can easily be filled with existing channels, but on a local multiplex where the capacity of the multiplex is likely to exceed the number of existing stations then there is the threat of new competitors arriving to fill these spaces, something which would impact on both the BBC and existing commercial stations.

The primary issue for the listener in all of this is the requirement to purchase a new receiving set and despite the rhetoric from broadcasting and policy elites, this has remained the stumbling block for the new technology. A survey by the World DAB

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[306] See Reimers (2005).
[307] Report on UK Commercial Radio's Future. 1998. National Economic Research Associates, London.

Forum in 1998 across 6 western European countries suggested 37% of households would be very interested in buying digital radios and would be prepared to pay up to 50% more than the price of an analogue set for a new digital car radio and around twice as much for a new portable radio[308] but such survey results did not translate into sales and things did not change until the first portable kitchen top DAB set under £100 became available in the UK in 2002.[309] This cheaper set did stimulate demand for DAB at the time although it is also important to note that demand was not just triggered by price but also by the fact that the BBC was in the process of launching a number of new digital only services. Undoubtedly these two factors provided the necessary conditions for a spike in interest in DAB sets among consumers proving the point that technology and content have a close relationship. However digital radio was still caught in an awkward marketing scenario where manufacturers were reluctant to invest in mass production until a full digital service was available from the broadcasters.

An even more prominent weakness of DAB was that by 2005, the original DAB system – and especially its audio coding – was widely considered to be inefficient and outdated (Ala-Fossi 2010, p57). New systems such as DAB+[310] Digital Video Broadcasting (DVB)[311] with more efficient audio coding were able to deliver higher quality sound and more services but again these systems required new reception methods, even DAB+ required a different receiving set to DAB. The relative success of DAB, especially in the UK made it impossible to abandon the project and demand consumers invest in another technology. So, after 2005, DAB was not only competing with various other digital systems but also with its own derivatives (Ala-Fossi ibid, p58). It was also now too difficult to simply abandon as consumers still held on to their analogue sets and broadcasters had invested in services for those listeners similarly willing to invest in DAB.

Despite DAB's ability to offer more services and better sound quality it was also hampered in its early days by issues such as short battery life and the fact that it did not possess the element of portability which characterised existing analogue sets due to the 'sheer size and weight of receiving sets' (Cornell, interview with author, 2003) so that

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[308] Report on UK Commercial Radio's Future. 1998. National Economic Research Associates, London.
[309] The Pure Evoke-1 came on the market on 1 July 2002 at £99.99.
[310] See Beutler (2008)
[311] See Reimers (2005).

early receivers were 'eerily reminiscent of the valve radios of the last century; heavy, expensive, non-portable' (Chignell 2009, p98). In order for consumers to invest in new sets, overcoming these problems was critical and this did not occur until the end of the 1990s.

It is naturally easier for a large national public service broadcaster to pursue a risky strategy of new instigating new technologies since they possess the strategic ability to invest in long term research and without the need to deliver an immediate return of large audiences to advertisers (Hendy 2000a, p50). This was the primary role for the BBC in the UK's implementation of a digital radio blueprint. For the strategy to work in the short-term particularly, it was also evident that the commercial sector would have a significant if not equal role to play. How this dynamic between two competing organisations would unfold in the attempt to promote DAB was uncertain but undoubtedly necessary.

Chapter 5

The BBC and DAB

Having considered the wider picture of DAB as a policy direction for the UK it is now time to reflect upon its implementation which was essentially the key role of the broadcasting industry. As we already know, the UK radio industry consisted of a duopoly during this embryonic stage of DAB development due to the new found position of the commercial sector. Previous to this however, the BBC had enjoyed a largely hegemonic status with the exception of a number of pertinent challenges in the 1930s and again in the 1960s.

The launch of digital radio in the UK was driven by a number of different forces; the external influence of the European Eureka 147 project, the internal influences of the BBC and the British government, before finally including the commercial radio sector. This chapter considers the strategic role played by the BBC in that launch process. Beginning with DAB consolidation in the 1990s the chapter then goes on to examine the importance of the *London Experiment* of the mid 1990s, the threat from the internet in the late 1990s and finally the desire to launch new services in the early 2000s. What were the BBC's core motivations and did these change or falter along the way? And what effect did DAB have on the BBC's own corporate broadcasting model and on its status within the radio industry?

The Early 1990s: Consolidation of DAB

A new age of broadcasting motivated by technological change and whose effects might alter the entire media landscape, had been envisaged from within the BBC as far back as the early 1980s although at this point the thrust of such change was perceived as occurring within in the realm of television:

> technical developments have produced a revolution… literally
> a revolution in the way people can use a television set… now the
> word 'broadcasting' needs to be modified to incorporate idea of
> 'narrowcasting' when signals instead of being broadcast indiscriminately
> to everyone across a whole area, can be focused more narrowly on
> specific groups who have elected to use a certain piece of technology.
> (Trethowan 1983).

Trethowan had been BBC Director General between 1977-1982 and his words reflect the sentiment within the BBC at that time. If the potential impact of future technology was worth appraisal for television then one has to ask why a similar concern was not apparent in radio. There are two reasons for this; firstly FM was the ongoing technological development within the radio industry and its continued roll-out was a major imperative within the BBC in the late 1980s and early 1990s until the point of spectrum scarcity. Secondly the BBC was already on the threshold of a new FM-linked radio technology, namely RDS or Radio Data System.[312]

RDS is a communications protocol standard for embedding small amounts of digital information over conventional FM radio broadcasts and was developed as a project within the EBU in the 1970s. It allows radio stations to transmit a digital message such as the station name, the name of the music being played or traffic information to suitably equipped receivers and allows for automatic retuning of stations to alternative frequencies thus making it particularly suitable for in-car radio (Sterling 2004, p1942). By 1985 the BBC was intending to demonstrate RDS at that year's Ideal Home Exhibition with the hope that electronics firms would start making sets which would work with the technology and become a standard addition to broadcasts on FM.[313] In many ways the development of RDS mirrors that of DAB. It was a pan-European project driven largely by the BBC and a number of other European broadcasters who then attempted to persuade car radio manufacturers to develop sets capable of carrying RDS technology.

By 1989 RDS was becoming a standard feature in car radios and was introduced by the leading car radio manufacturers such as Philips. Emphasis was placed on car radio sets simply because this was an area of listening which was more receptive to what the technology could offer and the BBC's decision to enter discussions with leading radio manufacturers for the production of RDS compatible in-car sets certainly helped advance its implementation.[314] But another interesting feature of this relatively rapid development and application of RDS was the fact that at the same time audio cassette players were also becoming more prevalent as a part of in-car entertainment. So as the in-car receiver market was going through change anyway it may have been easier to

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[312] For a thorough technical explanation of RDS see Kopitz and Marks (1999).
[313] Smart Radio is on the Air. *New Scientist*, 25 April 1985.
[314] BBC to Make RDS Radios. *Broadcast*, 26 May 1989.

implement two technological changes at the same time and sell what was seen as a 'desirable piece of in-car accessory.'[315]

The BBC undoubtedly felt a sense of ownership of the RDS technology and was keen to see its roll-out progress satisfactorily. The early unit price of sets starting at around £300-£400[316] was expensive but such a cost would be easily subsumed within the unit cost price of a new car while offering attractive use of new digital technology, and the BBC also hoped the cost would be reduced by its decision not to licence one single manufacturer but rather licence several companies or consortia.[317] Over 18 months during 1987 and 1988 the BBC had spent more than £1 million converting its transmitter network to RDS with the IBA following suit for commercial radio stations[318] thus making the roll-out of RDS for car radio virtually complete by the early 1990s alongside the similar roll-out of FM. By 1990 FM covered 95% of the UK population and was available for the national BBC networks of Radios 1, 2, 3 and 4[319] and RDS was established as a standard technology. The success of RDS therefore provides us with an interesting model of new technology within the UK radio industry. The BBC pioneers the new technology, concomitant changes in audio technology means manufacturers consider the risk to be worthwhile and the commercial sector comes to embrace and implement the new technology. RDS had the advantage of being widely acceptable and found little difficulty in attracting pioneers.

As we know, the BBC was involved in the early research stage of DAB from 1985. During the course of the research and development period we know that a motivation for its involvement was a broad interest, in conjunction with other interested parties, in developing 'a European technical standard for digital audio broadcasting'.[320] On a macro level it is possible to argue that the BBC simply shared in the altruistic motive to boost the European consumer electronics industry, but for a broadcaster this is unlikely to have been the sole driving force, for that we must examine the micro level and identify the corporation's own self-interest in the pursuit of DAB.

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[315] Audio Tunes into Profit. *The Times,* 14 March 1989.
[316] Overriding Case for Car Radio. *The Times*, 25 July 1989.
[317] BBC Raises Standards with its Own-Brand Radio. *New Scientist,* 5 May 1988.
[318] Traffic Flash. *New Scientist,* 15 October 1988.
[319] BBC Radio Transmitting Stations booklet. Spring 1990, BBC Engineering Information.
[320] Eureka http://www.eurekanetwork.org/about

While still highlighting the innovative nature of DAB and how it may avert a possible market failure within the existing radio hardware industry, by the early years of the 1990s the BBC was all too aware of DAB's inherent weaknesses, particularly in relation to the relatively satisfactory performance of FM which was still not without its detractors as 1 in 5 home listeners and 1 in 3 car listeners could cite problems with FM reception.[321] FM's reception and sound quality issues were regarded as a major selling point for DAB which was considered by those who had developed it as providing a vastly superior sound quality to FM and was not subject to the latter's problems of interference. The BBC went ahead with its first public demonstration of DAB in July 1991 when over 500 people from the radio industry, the consumer electronics industry and the press attended the very first UK demonstration of DAB by BBC engineers in Birmingham. The demonstration included a 20 minute coach journey around the city to illustrate the 'ruggedness of the DAB system in a city centre environment'[322] and the BBC concluded it was received with great acclaim with comments ranging from 'stunning' to 'mind-blowing'.[323] Following this positive reaction, the BBC carried out its first major market analysis of the potential of DAB during the course of 1992.[324] The subsequent report highlights the existing, well-trodden attributes which formed the core of the driving imperative to promote DAB, namely its innovative nature and its perception as a panacea to an existing sluggishness in the technology market, but the report was also realistic about DAB's inherent deficiencies. Reliability of reception and sound quality were still not proven selling factors, with more than 90% of listeners voicing satisfaction with the existing FM reception. As well as this, the prohibitive cost of first generation sets would further act as a disincentive.[325] The BBC also reveals at this stage its perspective on how the commercial sector will likely react to DAB; 'the cost implications suggest that it is therefore in the best interests of ILR/INR to prevent or slow the introduction of DAB regardless of any benefits it may bring consumers'.[326] At this point it is evident that the BBC does not envisage any early participative role for

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[321] Report: The Likely Market for DAB, August 1993. BBC WAC: E120-014 Part 1 Digital Audio Broadcasting – Project Group.
[322] ENGINF: The Quarterly for BBC Engineering, Technical and Operational Staff. No. 45, Summer 1991
[323] ibid.
[324] DAB: A Market Analysis. BBC Policy & Planning Unit. 5 October 1992. BBC WAC: E120-014, Part 1, Digital Audio Broadcasting – Project Group.
[325] The report suggests people will still be buying non-DAB radios well beyond 2000 (ibid).
[326] ibid.

the commercial sector in promoting DAB and nor does it see any benefit in such a role as 'even with involvement of BBC, INR and ILR, take up will be slow.'[327]

As the BBC's Charter was up for renewal in 1996 the question of the future of the BBC was on the minds of everyone. In November 1992 the government published its Green Paper; *The Future of the BBC*[328] which the BBC followed less than a week later with the strategy document *Extending Choice*[329] which John Birt sought to deliver as part of his aim to ensure the future survival of the BBC in the 'new broadcasting age'. DAB was considered an important part of this as the BBC perceived it as already being at an advanced stage of development and one which it believed would eventually become a global standard and of course it had been designed under huge BBC influence with the exigencies of the BBC at the forefront. Therefore, convinced DAB was still the best option for the BBC in the long term, it continued with its studies into the still uncertain potential of DAB, perhaps as a method of self-reassurance for its singular stance.

It is important to remember that during the early part of the 1990s while DAB as a technology had been established, its actual use was pretty much non-existent. Studies into possible future DAB penetration were purely speculative and it was believed that although radio listeners and retail trade representatives might be positive about the CD sound quality and absence of interference, early adoption was deemed most likely to come from hi-fi fanatics.[330] During this period these hi-fi fanatics represented a group recognised as *market innovators* i.e. the people:

> who are delighted to be the first to purchase and experiment with a
> product based on a new technology – even if it is imperfect and
> expensive… frequently they have technical talents and interests that
> make them want to 'own' and develop the technology because it is so
> new (Hill and Jones 2012, p198).

Such *market innovators* were renowned for acting with less caution than the wider consumer base and in the radio technology sector these were the same people who had

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[327] ibid.
[328] Green Paper: The Future of the BBC.1992. Cmnd 2098
[329] Extending Choice: The BBC's Role in the New Broadcasting Age. 1992. BBC Publications.
[330] BBC Broadcasting Research Report: The Likely Market for DAB. Qualitative Research Findings. 29 June 1993. BBC WAC: G100-009-004 Digital Audio Broadcasting Project, Part 1.

both the passion and financial means to initially test FM stereo when it arrived. Hill and Jones (ibid) go on to describe *early adopters* as the second tranche of consumers to enter the market and are those who:

> understand that the technology may have important future applications
> and are willing to experiment with it to see if they can pioneer new uses
> for the technology… they envision how the technology may be used in
> the future and they try to be the first to profit from its use.

Innovators and *early adopters* enter the market at the embryonic stage of the product and establish the market base before the next group enters and helps ensure the final sustainability of the new technology. Hill and Jones (ibid p199) call this group the *late majority* and they consist of customers who:

> purchase a new technology or product only when it is obvious the
> technology has great utility and is here to stay. A typical *late majority*
> customer group is the 'older' set of customers, familiar with their own
> technology but unfamiliar with the advantages of the new technology.

At this point in DAB history the *innovators* had therefore been identified but thoughts of the *late majority* were a long way off. The imperative to satisfy the *innovators* relied however on supplying a product and a service. Product launch relied on the support of manufacturers and in order to facilitate this, the BBC decided to take the first step in supplying the service element by aiming to launch a DAB platform.

The BBC ran its first short-term DAB trial in London on 6 September 1993 and this subsequently set in motion actions by the Radiocommunications Agency[331] to highlight and clear the UK's frequency needs for DAB at the International Telecommunications Union[332] (Stoller 2012, p153). At a meeting of the BBC Board of Management Technical Committee on 10th December 1993 it was decided that the BBC should trial a longer term DAB service in the London area beginning in 1995 which would deliver the existing national radio networks, and it was hoped this would then lead to an extension

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[331] The UK government's technical arm.

[332] The United Nations agency for information and communication technologies.

of the service to 60% of the UK population by March 1999.[333] It was hoped this initiative by the BBC would encourage manufacturers to join the cascade and ultimately supply sets for the market. The BBC's commitment at this point cannot be underestimated as it was determined the London experimental DAB network would be permanent and was to invest an initial £8 million to launch the project with an estimated subsequent operating cost of £1 million per annum thereafter.[334]

The role of the BBC and the government in promoting DAB is worth examining more closely at this point. John Major's Conservative government of the period[335] had been a strong supporter of the overall move to a digital Britain as it combined a 'strong promotion of the principles of competition with efforts to sustain a model of public service broadcasting' (Hardy 2008, p73) and this bore fruit with the publication of the white paper on digital broadcasting in August 1995.[336] Lax (2009, p128) argues that it was governments and not broadcasters who were the prime drivers of digital broadcasting and cites what Galperin (2004) believes were the principal motives for governments to do so namely, to provide a boost to the domestic consumer electronics industry, a belief in the idea of an imminent 'information society' and increasing demands on the radio spectrum. Lax's argument that broadcasters were not the initiators of the drive to digital can however be challenged in the correspondence between the government and the BBC which would suggest that the BBC saw its function as a driver:

> We have embraced and developed the new technology because we believe
> it offers very significant long term benefits for our listeners and for our
> radio broadcasters in general… There are risks in being *the leader* for such
> a venture… the early introduction of DAB will be of immense value to our
> listeners and also, offers the UK industry as a whole the valuable opportunity
> to become pioneers in the development of DAB products in Europe.[337]

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[333] Note from Bob Phillis (BBC Deputy Director General) regarding Board of Management Technical Committee meeting, 10 December 1993. BBC WAC: G080-006 Digital Audio Broadcasting.
[334] ibid.
[335] 28 November 1990 – 2 May 1997.
[336] White Paper: Digital Terrestrial Broadcasting: The Government's Proposals. Cm 2946. London, HMSO.
[337] Letter from Patricia Hodgson (Director, Policy & Planning) to Paul Wright (Department of National Heritage), 18 February 1994. BBC WAC: G080-006 Digital Audio Broadcasting.

At this point it is reasonable to question why the BBC did not simply continue with the roll-out and strengthening of FM since, after all, a policy of conversion of the popular national networks had been taking place around the same time. Radio 1 began occasional national broadcasts on FM in 1988 by being allowed to use Radio 2's FM transmitters for a few hours each week.[338] Once the 97–99 MHz frequencies became available towards the end of the 1980s, Radio 1 acquired them for its own national FM network. It was estimated the likely loss of audience, resulting from the complete switch from AM to FM on Radio 1, would be in the region of between 120,000 and 972,000 since BBC Engineering believed that although 98% of the country had FM coverage only 96% of the UK population would receive it satisfactorily. In the end the actual loss was calculated to be more in the region of at least 500,000, thus the switch to FM had a harmful effect on the Radio 1 audience.[339] As has been shown, one can cite other factors in accounting for this significant fall in audience numbers, as Radio 1 was undergoing a crisis of identity at this very time, and such arguments can be sustained but the fact that Radio 2 had similarly lost a significant number of listeners (2 million) when it surrendered its AM wavelength to Radio 5 in August 1990[340] suggests the impact of switching technology appears to be as good a reason to account for listener dispersal as much as on-air content. As part of its devotion to FM, Radio 1 actually rebranded itself as 1FM in 1992 when the FM roll out was underway and continued to employ this new name until mid-1995 when such branding was deemed to clash with the new emergent digital platform and it reverted to its original name. Although a relatively robust technology and with a successful market penetration, FM still faced the major obstacle of 'spectrum scarcity'. The FM spectrum was a finite resource and required 'rigorous protection against interference from competing broadcasters through government licensing of the spectrum for exclusive usage' (Berlemann and Mangold 2009, p2). As competition in the radio industry escalated with the arrival of the first national commercial broadcasters between 1992 and 1995 there were fears within the BBC that:

> Any new FM frequencies that might become available would be

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[338] 10:00pm to midnight on week nights, Saturday afternoons, as well as Sunday evenings, most notably for the Top 40 Singles Chart countdown.

[339] BBC Radio 1FM: The Switch to FM Only Broadcasting. Report by Paul Robinson (Managing Editor, BBC Radio 1FM) 1994. BBC WAC: E120-014 Part 1 Digital Audio Broadcasting – Project Group.

[340] BBC Radio 1FM: The Switch to FM Only Broadcasting. Report by Paul Robinson (Managing Editor, BBC Radio 1FM) 1994. BBC WAC: E120-014 Part 1 Digital Audio Broadcasting – Project Group.

allocated to an expanding commercial sector or worse still, existing BBC frequencies would be simply handed over to new commercial services. There was a realisation in the BBC that a full FM spectrum meant it was essential to go elsewhere (Jones, interview with author, 2014).

Evidence suggests the BBC may have been correct in thinking this may happen as it was at a time when the Conservative government of the day would have based such a decision on two factors; firstly a market driven policy for the broadcasting industry (Potschka 2012, chap 8) and an anti-BBC bias (Seaton 2015, p14). This, combined with a recent spate of success within the commercial sector, made BBC Managing Director of BBC Radio, Liz Forgan come to the conclusion that digital radio itself might even take further audience numbers from the BBC to the commercial stations so it was essential to attempt an early 'digital impact' (Jones, interview with author, 2014).

The BBC's commitment to DAB remained steadfast towards the end of 1994 despite its appreciation of the substantial element of risk in launching new media technologies, as had been seen with the example of FM. We see also at this time an even greater desire to embrace other partners in promoting DAB so that the Corporation can move on from being portrayed as the leading player in digital radio. It still felt that the commercial operators were likely to eschew any steps to aid in the early implementation of DAB so it was instead hoping for support from Government departments such as the Department for National Heritage and the Department of Trade and Industry instead.[341] Despite misgivings regarding any short-term commitment from the commercial sector, an interim report[342] nevertheless reveals the BBC's decision to initiate on-going discussions with the Radio Authority and INR stakeholders to develop UK DAB services with the aim of benefitting the entire radio industry. The report also outlines the BBC's less than altruistic reasons for attempting to coax the commercial sector. RAJAR research showed the number of radio stations available to the average listener had grown from around 5 to 14 over the previous 20 years and over the same period the BBC had been steadily losing its listening share to the commercial sector. As this trend was likely to continue, one of the BBC's biggest challenges would be to keep listeners loyal to the corporation, particularly as the commercial sector was likely to expand at a

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[341] Digital Audio Broadcasting Report, 29 September 1994. BBC WAC: G080-006 Digital Audio Broadcasting.
[342] ibid.

greater rate than the BBC in terms of services offered. With the commercial companies constantly pressing for the BBC to hand over one or more of its high quality FM frequencies the simple conclusion was that 'without a DAB commitment and the accompanying future prospect of unlimited spectrum they may eventually succeed'.[343] If DAB was the driving imperative in order to increase potential spectrum then the commercial sector would need to be on board for 'the final drive to completion.'[344] The report also addresses the idea of future possible service extensions to be broadcast on DAB which it suggests should in the short-term be simply public service programming involving low incremental costs but still adding to the range and effectiveness of BBC programmes.[345]

The Mid 1990s: The London Experiment

In the run up to the launch of the BBC's London experimental DAB network, which subsequently became known internally as the London Experiment, the corporation remained realistic yet sanguine about the prospect for the new technology. The months up to the launch would focus on manufacturers rather than consumers:

> 1995 is not the year DAB will take off as far as the public is concerned,
> they need the availability of radio receivers and since mass marketing of
> these products is unlikely to take place before 1997, the BBC's marketing
> role up until then should not be aimed at licence payers. Instead during this
> early experimental stage, BBC DAB should focus its resources at
> supporting the Corporation's switch-on in September 1995, and at
> encouraging and stimulating manufacturer development.[346]

Active steps were being made to persuade receiving set manufacturers to embark upon investing in their manufacture. The BBC contacted Philips[347] regarding the provision of receivers for test purposes for the forthcoming experiment phase and secured and

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[343] ibid.

[344] ibid.

[345] ibid.

[346] BBC DAB Marketing Strategy (1995-1998), 1994. BBC WAC: E120-014, Part 1, Digital Audio Broadcasting – Project Group.

[347] One of the world's largest electronics companies
http://www.philips.co.uk/about/company/index.page

ordered 12 such receivers which Philips duly agreed to supply by March 1995,[348] thus these sets may very well be considered to have been the first bulk order for DAB sets in the UK. The Department of Trade and Industry also played a role in attempting to persuade UK manufacturers to help develop the required integrated circuits or 'chips' necessary for the mass production of DAB receivers through the offer of financial support to interested companies,[349] no doubt because this would have been seen as a lucrative pathway for British industry. A problem of the new DAB technology was that early receiver models required high current levels which led to an excessive drain on battery power and which also meant equipment could be bulky thus rendering it impractical for portable and in-car use. Consequently from the very beginning of DAB standardisation in 1986, it was clear that the delivery of a key component for receivers i.e. a suitable 'chip' was required for the success of this new standard (Hoeg and Lauterbach 2003, p284). When this joint BBC and Department of Trade and Industry campaign to engender interest amongst British manufacturers was instigated, it was noted that interested parties were 'thin on the ground' and that the BBC might have to invest further funds in becoming part of some form of consortium with those who could be persuaded to participate.[350] Manufacturers remained reluctant to make any commitment to providing either receivers or components of receivers for the wider market and were clearly awaiting positive signals that DAB might become a reality. Even the Dutch company Philips who had agreed to supply the initial 12 sets felt that this would be the end of the order.[351] The commercial sector would eventually come to play a crucial role in this aspect in the penetration of DAB by producing their own chip which would have a positive effect on the technology's pricing structure.

There were of course inherent risks in affecting a huge level of investment for which the return would be at best delayed and at worst uncertain. Acting as the sole promoter of DAB in the UK at this time, the BBC found itself spearheading the new technology's development. It appreciated the commercial sector would be in no position to risk investment at this stage and therefore had to devote a significant amount of effort to

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[348] Proposed DAB Service. Note from Rod Lynch (Managing Director, BBC Resources to Liz Forgan (Managing Director, BBC Radio), 28 March 1994. BBC WAC: G001-002 Digital Audio Broadcasting.
[349] ibid.
[350] Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) Service Project: An Update on Progress, 1 June 1994. BBC WAC: G001-002 Digital Audio Broadcasting.
[351] ibid.

getting receiver manufacturers on board and this long before it envisaged the wider audience even contemplating the move to digital.

Liz Forgan was able to formally announce at the Voice of the Listener and Viewer luncheon on 24 November 1994 that the BBC was to launch its digital audio broadcasting service in September 1995.[352] In addition to the existing five national BBC radio services there would initially be extended parliamentary and sports coverage, all offering near CD quality audio:[353]

> DAB offers the chance for listeners to have access to parliament
> on a scale which the BBC has never before been able to offer…
> good reception will no longer depend on adjusting aerials or
> moving receivers. The Proms will be crystal clear, even in a car.[354]

Forgan went on to add the BBC was the first broadcaster in the world to make such a firm commitment to launching a DAB radio service while the Department of National Heritage also confirmed government plans for five commercial stations to follow the move to DAB. However this air of digital exuberance was tempered by the Dutch electronics company, Philips, which pointed out that in the immediate future radio manufacturers would not be able to meet demand for DAB receivers and that any mass produced versions were still likely to cost hundreds of pounds.[355] Despite this, the BBC remained committed to the launch which would only cover the Greater London area initially but with the intention of reaching 60% of the UK population over the following three years.[356]

The success of the BBC's launch would very much depend on simultaneous availability of receiving sets despite the industry's natural reticence. To that end the BBC held a DAB seminar at Kingswood Warren[357] on the 6th of December 1994 aimed at receiver manufacturers who were informed of the important role they had to play in the launch

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[352] Engineering test transmissions had been in operation since 1990.

[353] BBC Radio to Launch New Digital Service in 1995. BBC Press Release, 24 November 1994.

[354] BBC Makes Radio's Future Crystal Clear. *The Times*, 25 November 1994.

[355] *The Times* (ibid).

[356] BBC to Launch Digital Radio Services in 1995. *Broadcast,* 2 December 1994.

[357] The home of BBC R&D, 1948-2008. See; The Show's Over: After 60 years, BBC Inventors Are Leaving Kingswood Warren*, The Independent*, 16 January 2008.

by providing receivers for the market; in fact the BBC issued this as a challenge for the manufacturers to 'get receivers on sale in quantity at the earliest possible moment and at a price our listeners will find attractive.'[358] The seminar also smacks of an element of desperation as the BBC went on to beg not to let licence fee payers down while at the same time insisting on how the sets themselves should be designed:

> Our research suggests that some of your products are a
> barrier to people enjoying the radio. Extra buttons, displays
> and flashing lights may appeal to a segment of the market but
> … in all your research and development, please ask the question
> and think about elegant, chic, simplicity.[359]

The message to the manufacturers was clear, DAB was exciting and both they and the BBC could benefit from the rewards of value to licence fee payers on one hand and sales and profits on the other. One can argue that at this point the BBC's vision regarding DAB was somewhat myopic since there was no mention of how market potential might increase further should the commercial stations join the fray. Also, the BBC was relying largely on audience research which at this time suggested listeners did not desire additional content but simply an improved, near-CD sound quality for existing output.[360] The BBC still felt that the manufacturers were not getting the signs that this could go from what was a basic R&D proposition to a launch with market potential so it was important that the BBC did something decisive and that came in the form of the London Experiment which it was hoped would illustrate digital's possibilities (Jones, interview with author, 2014).

There was still a great deal of uncertainty even after the BBC had made the announcement about the London Experiment. The BBC had crossed the rubicon by committing to a trial which it was hoped would become permanent. However, it knew that beyond this point the future success of DAB would depend on having two groups on board namely, consumers and eventually the commercial radio sector. The audience had now become known as consumers in much of the BBC documentation of the time as it was their purchasing power which was of greater necessity than their listening

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[358] Notes for Kingswood Warren DAB Seminar, 6 December 1994. BBC WAC: G001-005-002, Digital Broadcasting – General.
[359] Notes for Kingswood Warren DAB Seminar (ibid).
[360] Notes for Kingswood Warren DAB Seminar (ibid).

tastes. Equally, the commercial companies were required to help push DAB as a distribution and reception standard in order that these consumers would have access to all digital radio services, both BBC and commercial. But this led to the core issue at the time which was what the BBC called the 'chicken and egg problem'[361] in getting consumers and radio companies to promote DAB. Which group would be first to take action and essentially force the other to come on board? For the commercial companies it would mean incurring significant costs in transmitter upgrades as well as the lesser recognised problem of coordinating a number of other stations which would be required to fill a DAB multiplex (Lister et al 2010, p131). For consumers, having only the BBC national stations on DAB would not be a great enough incentive to purchase a new, expensive receiving set as many would indubitably prefer to wait until their favourite commercial station was also available on the same platform.

It is also important to note at this point that developments in various other digital radio technologies abroad were constantly monitored on how they were succeeding or otherwise: for example, satellite DAB which Worldspace was planning to roll out in the Middle East and Africa,[362] which might suggest the BBC's commitment to DAB at this point was still not wholehearted.

One can argue that the period up until the launch of the London Experiment was characterised by a slight degree of uncertainty within the BBC with possible scenarios of success or failure undergoing constant evaluation, the worst possible outcome being DAB technology written off completely (Jones, interview with author, 2014). Crucial to these potential outcomes was whether the commercial sector would eventually engage in the process, with 'no interest or investment emanating from that sector being the worst possible outcome.'[363] The inherent dangers of any substantial delays in DAB roll-out was also a contributing factor in the BBC's feeling of insecurity; unless DAB was to generate some success in the medium term it could rapidly spiral into failure. Since the BBC clearly understood this to be too much of a financial risk for the commercial companies at this stage, it concluded that it still had more work to do on its own in order to promote wider uptake of DAB and now identified two possible strategies for continuing the drive to digital. One was to continue to promote all its services on DAB,

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[361] Discussion Document: Background & Development of DAB, 3 February 1995. BBC WAC: E120-014 Part 1 Digital Audio Broadcasting – Project Group.
[362] Memo from Paul Robinson (Project Director, 10 Year Strategy) to 10 Year Strategy Group, 28 February 1995. BBC WAC: G100-009-004 Digital Audio Broadcasting Project Part 6.
[363] Digital Audio Broadcasting: Strategy & Business Plan, 14 July 1995. BBC WAC: E120-014 Part 1 Digital Audio Broadcasting – Project Group.

thus expanding on the forthcoming London Experiment by rolling it out more rapidly to the rest of the country, and it was believed such a strategy would be effective in appealing to 15-20% of the existing BBC audience beset with existing audio reception problems. The second option was the more radical step of providing entirely new services which would appeal to new audiences who would only be able to receive such new services on new DAB sets: this new competitive element might also have a coercive effect on competitors. Having considered these options the BBC came to the conclusion that in order to achieve a targeted 40% of penetration in 10 years, DAB as a whole must carry distinctive new services.[364] Some speculation was also devoted to what form new services should take: these included ideas of a 'lifestyle' service for 30-50 year olds and a service which would exploit existing resources such as the BBC's extensive archive.[365] Alas the notion of new services and what form they would take would not come to fruition for another 7 years.

Unfortunately, any confidence over the experimental transmissions was crudely deflated at the 1995 Internationale Funkausstellung (IFA)[366] in Berlin at which a number of European manufacturers had intended to display receiving sets in what was supposed to be in effect a launch of the first models. Cornell (interview with author, 2003) explains that it became apparent just a few weeks before the exhibition that the sets would not be forthcoming but the BBC decided to go ahead with the launch of its DAB trial. This was a hugely disappointing set-back for the BBC and for DAB radio generally in Britain. Transmissions were to begin but there was no way to receive them. The digital reality for the foreseeable future was that the BBC would be broadcasting on DAB 'to virtually no one outside the technicians within the broadcasting industry' (Cornell ibid).

The BBC eventually launched its DAB trial service on 27 September 1995 claiming that the 'BBC embarks on the third age of radio with Digital Audio Broadcasting.'[367] Liz Forgan heralded the trial as:

> the dawn of a third age of radio – the technological progression from
> AM which is now 100 years old, and FM, now 50 years old, into the

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[364] ibid.

[365] Some of these ideas would be expanded upon before the launch of new services in 2002.

[366] Originally the Berlin Radio Show the exhibition is now one of the world's leading trade shows for consumer electronics. http://b2b.ifa-berlin.com

[367] BBC Press Release, 27 September 1995.

digital multi-media world of the 21st century. Consumers will get superb

quality sound, a fade-free signal and a whole range of new services on

simple, easy-to-use sets.

The initial service would cover 20% of the population using 5 transmitters in the

Greater London area, with the intention of extending to 60% of the population by March

1998 as a further 22 transmitters were planned to become operational.[368] As well as

simultaneous digital transmission of the existing BBC national analogue stations and

the BBC World Service, extra channels were introduced although these could be

considered as bolt-ons rather than new channels. One was a sports commentary service,

another was a BBC Parliament channel.[369] Undoubtedly an important public service it

was also important to impress the political elites so it was decided to play directly to

their own desires by publicising this one particular benefit of DAB on the day of the

announcement of the launch of the new service:

> We would like to write to selected MPs to inform them of
>
> improved Parliamentary coverage that will flow from the
>
> announcements that Liz (Forgan) made earlier.[370]

Another new service unique to DAB was 'BBC Now' which offered news, sport, traffic

and weather in a 10 minute rolling news format 24 hours a day (Tuttlebee and Hawkins

1998): it was hailed as a 'nifty news service that will be up and running by the time the

first domestic digital radio receivers hit the shops in two years' time.'[371] Alas this

ambitious service did not come to fruition and 'BBC Now' was abandoned within two

years.

At the announcement of the launch of the London Experiment, Liz Forgan did not deny

that there was still a major problem with the lack of widespread availability of domestic

receivers in retail outlets, in fact Forgan made it clear that these would probably not be

available for at least another two years and this prediction was backed up by the state of

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[368] ibid.

[369] This channel continued until November 2000 when it transferred to the digital terrestrial television platform.

[370] Letter to MPs on DAB: Memo from Iain Wilton (BBC Public Affairs) to Glyn Jones (Head of Digital Radio Project), 24 November 1994. BBC WAC: G001-005-002 Digital Audio Broadcasting – General.

[371] Now, Here's the News-on-demand. *New Scientist*, 7 October 1995.

the manufacturing industry at the time. Over this short-term future period the BBC was therefore the sole force of commitment to DAB by aiming to spend £10 million on establishing a new network of 27 transmitters.[372] Part of the BBC's investment in DAB also included developing the appropriate BBC receiver technology. While the BBC's Research and Development department based at Kingswood Warren had developed a software 'concept receiver' this did not fully demonstrate DAB's full potential as it consisted of a rudimentary PC with a DAB receiver attached so it was deemed imperative by BBC R&D engineers:

> as a matter of some urgency, we initiate an external collaborative
> project to produce software to extend the functionality of the
> concept receiver.[373]

With continued reticence from manufacturers, the involvement of the commercial sector was beginning to become a greater imperative if DAB was to succeed and so meetings were initiated with the Radio Authority in order to discuss the shared interest both parties might have in promoting DAB. BBC notes from an initial meeting in October 1995 suggest there was mutual support for a greater remit for the UK DAB Forum as well as the instigation of a 'DAB champion' from the commercial side.[374] The first meeting of the Publicity and Promotions Working Group of the UK National DAB Forum took place at the BBC on 4 January 1996 and among those present were representatives from the BBC, from set manufacturers, from transmitter companies as well as Paul Brown from the AIRC. The aim was to:

> actively promote awareness of DAB in the UK with a
> coordinated message to specific target audiences particularly
> retailers and the trade press.[375]

It is interesting to note that the set manufacturers were very much still an official part of the process and if steps should continue in the right direction then the retail sector could

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[372] ibid *New Scientist*.

[373] Outline of Work Plan to Investigate DAB Concept Receiver, 26 October 1995. BBC WAC: E120-014 Part 2 Digital Audio Broadcasting – Project Group.

[374] Minutes of DAB Project Board Meeting, 27 October 1995. BBC WAC: E120-014 Part 2 Digital Audio Broadcasting – Project Group.

[375] UK National DAB Forum – Publicity & Promotions Working Group, minutes of meeting on 4 January 1996. BBC WAC: E120-014 Part 2 Digital Audio Broadcasting – Project Group.

be the next group to participate. By early 1996 there was speculation within the BBC that amongst the main receiver manufacturers in Europe and Japan there was 'a race on to get receivers into shops.'[376] The hope was that the first DAB sets would finally be on show at the next Internationale Funkausstellung (IFA) in September 1997 with this first generation being primarily in-car sets and portables following as the second generation. As in 1995, the BBC was again felt let down by the manufacturers who once more failed to produce any significant products at the Berlin show in 1997. Cornell (interview with author, 2003) describes the disappointment at how the BBC prepared for its services to be relayed to the IFA but were not able to be heard due to the fact that sets were largely absent on stands. Despite this a degree of realism was still called for as it was noted that 10 years after the launch of the CD player they had managed to achieve only 40% household penetration.[377] The BBC was desperate for this to work as DAB now formed a core part of BBC Radio's 10 Year Strategy with a cost of implementation £23 million cited in its DAB business plan.[378] Jones (interview with author, 2014) believes this was a low point for the BBC in its DAB journey as it had put tremendous faith in the manufacturers to produce the essential sets for the 1997 show. He suggests the BBC and the manufacturers at this point had very little understanding of each other's business models which led to a collapse in communication and it is possible to argue that the BBC then shifted its focus more towards the commercial sector as a partner who at least understood the nature of the industry.

Changes were taking place within the BBC organisational structure around the time the London Experiment was operational. Marmaduke Hussey announced his retirement as Chairman of the BBC Board of Governors in January 1996[379] and as his swansong was able to highlight his belief in DAB by stating:

> One of the things I'm most proud of at the BBC is that I've helped bring radio back to the forefront… We've put £10 million down (into Digital Audio Broadcasting) without a single set available… but if you believe in things then you must back them.[380]

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[376] Digital Audio Broadcasting Update: DAB Project Board meeting, 26 February 1996. BBC WAC: E120-014 Part 2 Digital Audio Broadcasting – Project Group.
[377] ibid.
[378] ibid.
[379] He would leave the BBC on 31 March.
[380] Interview with Marmaduke Hussey, *Daily Telegraph*, 18 January 1996.

Liz Forgan also decided to leave her position as Managing Director of BBC Radio in February 1996[381] although on parting she was able to claim she had left DAB well on course both within the BBC and in the industry as a whole.[382] Director General John Birt meanwhile had informed the BBC Radio department that he himself would fully brief the new incoming BBC Chairman, Sir Christopher Bland, on DAB although Birt did not reveal what form his briefing would take, which created a degree of uncertainty in the department[383] as Birt's commitment to DAB may not have been considered positive within the BBC's radio division (Nelson, interview with author, 2003).

The Late 1990s: The Internet, A Digital Threat?

By January 1999 John Birt was approaching the end of his tenure as BBC Director General and in an attempt to bequeath a lasting legacy to the corporation, he initiated a twenty year strategy preparing the BBC for the digital future which became known internally as the Hever Process.[384] As part of this process, BBC Radio management reinforced their vision of the future of digital radio, focusing on DAB (Nelson, interview with author, 2003). Senior figures within the higher echelons of the corporation did not however share a similar commitment to DAB as a model of radio listening (Nelson ibid). Birt himself during the latter years of the 1990s, was becoming increasingly more committed to the idea of internet radio and wanted the BBC to embrace this platform. Nelson (ibid) claims Birt felt the internet was:

> going to become the main digital distribution channel for radio and the main tool for the consumption of radio; he believed radio as a medium was struggling and the plethora of new personalised radio stations that were starting to spring up on the net were going to erode established corporate radio.

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[381] Over a disagreement with Director General John Birt regarding the move of BBC Radio News from Broadcasting House to Television Centre. *The Independent*, 25 January 1996.
[382] DAB Project Board, minutes of meeting, 2 February 1996. BBC WAC: E120-014 Part 2 Digital Audio Broadcasting – Project Group.
[383] ibid.
[384] Named after Hever Castle in Kent where senior managers gathered to brainstorm this strategy.

If BBC radio was to have any future at all, Birt argued it would have to develop a presence in that space (Birt 2002, p469).

As a listening platform, internet radio at this point in its history simply meant live radio being distributed over the web with listeners receiving audio on their desk-top computers requiring of course a resilient internet connection. One survey indicated that as early as 1996 there were over 1,200 radio stations from 150 countries with web pages (Tyler and Laing 1998, p30) but as Hendy (2000a, p56) points out this was a gross underestimate of the number of internet radio services and cites research by the National Association of Broadcasters in the USA from September 1997 which counted 4,178 such stations in the USA alone and even that figure excluded variations such as short-term webcasts by student radio stations and community groups.

There are a number of facets of internet radio which render it different from other radio broadcasting models, whether digital or analogue. It is relatively easy for someone to set up an internet radio service and they can do so without the regulatory parameters which bind traditional broadcasting models, so by June 2003 the 25 most listened to internet radio stations in the world featured just 5 simulcasted by existing broadcasters with the remaining 20 being internet only stations (Wall 2004). The web can also offer 'non-listening' content i.e. interactive or promotional content beyond the audio stream and of course can be broadcast to a global audience who require only a PC and internet access in order to consume it. The internet had the potential to open up a myriad of opportunities for established broadcasters and for those who wished to create their own radio content, this would create an entirely new dimension to radio broadcasting. Wall (ibid), although referring specifically to music radio, describes the complexion of internet radio and his description can equally be applied to speech radio:

> The new technologies of the internet, at first, seem to offer a
> space in which… radio can be made free of corporate interests,
> where innovation can take place, and therefore where variety can
> flourish for the public good. The relative scarcity of broadcast
> frequencies… disappears when we are considering the almost
> unlimited capacity of the internet for new broadcasters and broadcasts…
> These new technologies of broadcasting and reception have the
> capability of offering a wide range of new forms of radio; they initially

transform existing patterns of ownership and control, and allow us
to re-run the debates about the nature and purpose of radio texts.

Priestman (2002, pxii) outlines a few extra perceived advantages of internet radio as it was emerging in the late 1990s, these include: firstly, the internet itself is driven by far more powerful economic forces than the radio industry itself; secondly, the technology of the internet is still evolving; and thirdly, internet radio does not need to supplant analogue radio but can in effect live quite happily alongside any other broadcast medium. Priestman's last point requires re-evaluation however. While indeed many existing radio stations might have considered internet services as an integral, though still secondary, part of their operations, the threat would come from new players or what Hendy (2000a, p56) calls 'micro-broadcasters' who would now see the internet as their natural home and tailor output for targeted audiences. For the existing commercial sector, an internet presence might create commercial advantages through advertising and exposure to direct marketing so it is possible to argue that it was an attractive add-on for commercial stations. For public service broadcasters such as the BBC, Hendy (ibid, p57) points out that an internet dimension was seen as a 'means of enhancing several of their non-commercial functions' by reaching audiences in a different way and interactivity would be a means of feeding back into the nature of the conventional broadcasting model.

The notion of interactivity and its importance had gained greater importance as we drew towards the millennium, largely as a result of the constantly evolving technology of the internet as identified by Priestman (op cit). But it was something that took a while to be appreciated as an aid to the broadcast experience. Croosdale (1995) describes the BBC's first use of interactivity on a national radio programme, *The Network,*[385] which ran live on air over 1994 and 1995 and this early experience proved that the exercise was not quite as fruitful as may have been hoped, largely due to delays in receiving live interaction as a result of 'issues around the technical and logistical aspect of immediate electronic communication' (Croosdale ibid).

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[385] Peter Croosdale was producer of *The Network* which ran over three series. It was a programme about the transformation, manipulation, flow and control of information in a 30 minute live magazine format which attempted to include live input from listeners.

One of the defining attributes of internet radio is the platform's inherent ability to offer a 'time shift' dimension to the listening experience in the form of audio-on-demand. Listeners become emancipated as they free themselves of the shackles of strict scheduling and schedulers' calculations regarding times and slots become irrelevant. This again raises the pertinent question, is this radio? Black (2001) asks himself a number of questions regarding the entire matter of internet radio:

> Why should an audio signal delivered through the internet be called 'radio' in the first place?... Do listeners to internet audio streams count as radio listeners? Or is 'internet radio' a different medium from 'radio' and if so why has it borrowed the name? Which comes first, the name or the medium? Indeed whose idea was it to call it that?

Audio-on-demand became a hugely important dimension of the BBC's internet presence. In many ways, to answer Black's questions, it brought radio back to its original interpretation. Before audio-on-demand, the radio internet presence included live streaming and auxiliary interactive or information content. Audio-on-demand placed actual radio content and the 'listening' experience back at the core of the BBC's radio presence on the web. As Wall (2004) remarks this had special resonance for the BBC:

> For a public service broadcaster like BBC radio, the on-demand concept can extend the lifetime, and therefore the audience for an expensive programme , and so extend their public service justification for expensive productions.

The public service aspect of audio-on-demand was greatly appreciated by the BBC which at the end of the 1990s and in the early years of the 2000s spent a great deal of time and effort securing rights to provide this 'catch-up' audio on the web. Nelson (interview with author, 2003) claims this became 'a crucial policy within the BBC Radio division.'

Returning to the predilection for internet radio by John Birt, the upshot of his analysis and insistence was a reining in of DAB ambitions within BBC Radio and a determined

effort to develop an internet presence for the national radio networks, thus we see the emergence of websites for Radios 1 to 5 over the course of 1999 and 2000, offering streaming audio facilities and other network information compatible with internet presence. Nelson (ibid) argues that Birt's proclivity for the internet was deeply flawed:

> He felt that the internet was going to become the main digital
> distribution method for radio and listening to radio, he thought that
> radio as a medium was dying and new personalised stations that were
> starting to spring up on the net were going to chip away at radio and
> he wanted to get into that space… the upshot of it all was we scaled
> right back our ambitions for new services and we scaled right back
> our future ambitions for DAB in general and began to speak instead
> about developing more powerful Radio websites.

Thus began a period of investment in the web presence of all the BBC's national radio stations, driven by Birt (Nelson ibid).

By 2003, RAJAR figures showed online listening had increased almost fourfold since March 2000 when it first started recording web audiences. Though more than half listened to a national radio service, more online listeners were tuning into non-UK stations than local radio. But despite the increase in UK online listening, just 13.2% of radio listeners chose the internet as a method of access compared to the 18.6% who listened via digital television.[386] Also by 2002 the shape of radio on the web was beginning to take on new forms, a good example being Last.FM, 'a type of internet radio station which employed algorithms to generate specific music for users in a serendipitous fashion' (Haupt 2009). For most of the established UK radio players internet radio was seen as an important conduit in a bid to reach as many listeners as possible, but of course in these early days of broadband penetration and long before wi-fi, people were paying to listen on the internet, which meant the focus of attention remained with DAB and this was the case for the BBC as much as for the big commercial players, as Capital Radio's Nathalie Schwarz[387] expounded: 'although the internet is important, in terms of scale of investment our prime emphasis is DAB.'[388]

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[386] RAJAR Q3 2003.
[387] Capital Radio Director of Strategy & Development.
[388] The New Pioneers. *The Guardian*, 18 August 2003.

What is important though was that the internet was an arena with which the BBC had to engage and it was still the place from which a new competitive element could emanate as it was now the home of a new generation of broadcasting pioneers. The internet also heralded a new form of connectivity between broadcasters of whatever form and audiences. The media landscape would change significantly into one characterised by 'media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence' (Jenkins 2008) and by the early 2000s the BBC was certainly well on this path and one could argue that Birt set this in motion.

The third platform for listening to digital radio was via a television set. BBC services have been available since 2000 on digital satellite and on digital terrestrial. Following the November 2002 launch of the digital set top box offered by Freeview, the ten national digital radio stations were soon added to the channel list as well as BBC World Service. With the lack of confidence shown by manufacturers in entering the DAB market at the time, supplying radio via a digital television proved to be a saviour for the digital radio cause, though possibly to the detriment of the arrival of actual DAB sets due to the hugely successful penetration of digital television across the UK. By 2002, 32% of the UK population claimed to be receiving digital television with 10.9% of the adult population claiming to listen to the radio through digital television.[389] There were considerable differences between different platforms in terms of the number of available radio stations, with a significantly larger range available to subscribers to Sky Digital, although the number of available stations has increased through cable digital. At this time Sky Digital was the dominant platform in terms of radio listening, with 67% of digital television radio listeners subscribing to the satellite platform. Overall the satellite platform represented 61% of the overall digital market, 34% of cable digital subscribers claiming to have listened to the radio via their television as compared with 39% of all satellite digital subscribers.[390]

The effect of an increased focus on the internet and digital television towards the end of the 1990s, particularly as espoused by Birt, meant that the position of DAB was to fall in the ranking of the BBC's digital imperatives. It did not disappear altogether but became part of a portfolio rather than an objective in its own right as it had been before.

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[389] BBC Quest Report: Digital Platforms, 2002.
[390] ibid.

Jones (interview with author, 2014) says the BBC at this time adopted a policy of 'platform neutrality', in other words when it came to referencing digital platforms this meant availability on digital radio, digital television and the internet. Highlighting one particular platform went against BBC policy of the time. With a huge drive towards the internet under Birt and a similar drive towards digital terrestrial television under Dyke (Iosifidis 2005) and a perhaps phlegmatic approach to radio from both Directors General, Jones argues that 'platform neutrality was probably something that ultimately held digital radio back'. One can also argue that following the departure of Liz Forgan as a champion of DAB it lost some of its currency during the years of her replacement, Matthew Bannister[391] who shared much of Birt's philosophy[392] and was able sometime after his tenure to reflect on digital radio, which he had supported while in office, as a 'costly dud'.[393]

Bannister's successor in 1999, Jenny Abramsky, took DAB off the back burner and put it at the 'forefront of BBC Radio policy and indeed BBC policy in general' (Nelson, interview with author, 2003). By the time Greg Dyke became Director General in January 2000 the radio websites had become well established and universally recognised as offering a new important service. This new provision of public service broadcasting and a successful licence fee settlement, coupled with the arrival of Dyke meant the possibility of offering new digital radio services was firmly back on the agenda. Dyke himself, although admitting to possessing a poor understanding of radio, became supportive of Abramsky's desires to continue to pursue the DAB route (Dyke 2005, p176), trusting perhaps her superior knowledge and experience of the field (Nelson, interview with author, 2003).

The Early 2000s: New Services

By summer 1995 the BBC was keen to promote DAB with even greater vigour, claiming that its future was dependent on the success of the latter.[394] There were three key constituents whose attitudes and actions were now crucial namely: receiver

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[391] Director, BBC Radio 1996-1999.
[392] Bannister had played a central role in the *Extending Choice* project.
[393] *The Times*, 7 September 2001.
[394] Developing the DAB Service Proposition, May 1995. BBC WAC: G001-005-002, Digital Broadcasting – General.

manufacturers, radio retailers and listeners. The manufacturers were deemed the primary group and liaison with them was one of the main activities of the DAB project team within the BBC's radio division (Jones, interview with author, 2014). From this it was thought listeners would follow as continued research suggested they regarded DAB as a 'real advance for radio'.[395] Naturally there were concerns regarding potential risks such as manufacturers failing to deliver sets at the right price or the BBC itself not being in a position to deliver the necessary content to maintain momentum. However we also see an encroaching uncertainty regarding whether or not to embark on the costly process of delivering new services. At the forefront of this hesitancy was the debate over whether BBC investment in new services should follow the take-up of DAB or seek to lead it.[396] Reflecting an insecurity regarding DAB's appeal per se, the BBC's Radio division felt compelled to argue within the corporation:

> the built in attractions of DAB are not overwhelming, and
> increased BBC investment in new services is therefore a necessary
> condition for DAB's success.[397]

This clearly reveals that the DAB project was one emanating from the BBC Radio division and not necessarily one exalted by overall BBC management. Nelson (interview with author, 2003) claims it was not just Birt but:

> most of the most influential members within the higher echelons of the
> BBC didn't believe in DAB at all, didn't believe it was going to take off
> and in particular didn't believe that we needed new radio services.

As we have seen, the potential of new services to entice both consumers and manufacturers was considered by the BBC and the notion of new services began to appear even more attractive as it might give some headway against the commercial sector. As the BBC surmised, since there was no mention of new services at all at this stage in discussions with commercial representatives under the auspices of the UK DAB Forum, this offered a 'window of opportunity to announce new services with a lower

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[395] BMRB qualitative research: DAB, April 1995.
[396] Developing the DAB Service Proposition, May 1995. BBC WAC: G001-005-002, Digital Broadcasting – General.
[397] BBC Radio: 10 Year Strategy (1995).

than usual risk of political flack from commercial radio.'[398] It was still deemed however, too soon to define what any new services might sound like although it would nevertheless be:

> a useful move to announce that we are working on a range of ideas,
> and mark out the turf, given the government's support for BBC
> Radio's pioneering role in DAB, the government is likely to be
> supportive to new services intended to stimulate DAB take-up.[399]

The BBC had of course initially promoted DAB on the improvement in sound quality and multimedia capabilities with new services coming well down the list as expounded by Liz Forgan at the September 1995 launch, although this was to change over time as new services became the pre-eminent feature of DAB. But for the first few years the BBC was merely simulcasting its existing output and Rudin (2006) suggests this had a detrimental effect as:

> the emphasis on sound quality over programme number and range
> stuck and, it can be argued, dogged the perception and take-up of DAB
> for many years.

Jones (interview with author, 2014) believes the BBC Radio division sought to create new digital stations as it began to realise that merely continuing to simulcast existing services meant that the BBC's multiplex 'would look 'empty' and offer a case for the commercial sector to request a presence on that multiplex.' Jones (ibid) goes on to claim that it was imperative this remained a BBC only multiplex and the idea of sharing it with commercial stations would have been a 'very tricky bicycle to ride'. But if new services were to be a longer term strategy, its shape would need to fit with the corporation's wider long term strategy. So how did the BBC see itself in the new century? It attempted to envisage the scenario in a publication called *The BBC Beyond 2000.*[400] Although DAB remained a core strategy of digital radio it was also noted that access to radio would take a completely new shape as:

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[398] DAB Update & Issues for Consideration. Paper for Radio Directorate meeting, 7 February 1996. BBC WAC: E120-014 Part 2 Digital Audio Broadcasting – Project Group.
[399] ibid.
[400] The BBC Beyond 2000, BBC Publications, 1998.

> New technologies are revolutionising communications and creating
> new opportunities for audiences and for broadcasters… they will be able
> to access radio and television through their PC and select programmes
> on demand.[401]

The document also predicted that whole industries were set to converge namely radio, television and online, and for radio this would mean that methods of listening would alter significantly. Certainly the internet would become more important for radio, perhaps justifying John Birt's appreciation of its importance for broadcast media. It was revealed that BBC Radio would be increasing its commitment to live musical performance so events such as the Proms, Glastonbury and Radio 1 Live events would now sit across the new tri-media platforms and represent therefore a new tri-media direction for radio.[402] The BBC was also aware that the commercial radio sector would undergo change and particularly would witness further consolidation with the market becoming dominated by the big three companies, Capital, EMAP and GWR.[403]

The BBC announced its new digital radio service plans in October 2000 and submitted them to the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) in January 2001. However it is largely forgotten that between 1995 and 2000 the BBC had already been trialling a number of services on DAB. As well as the existing Radios 1 to 5 and the BBC World Service and BBC Parliament there were also curious short-term endeavours which included a poetry loop made by the BBC Radio Features department, a BBC Top 40 service, BBC Opera, BBC Comedy and a number of pilots created to coincide with the annual Radio Festival. Another incarnation, Radio 5 Live Sports Plus offered extra sports commentaries but as was the case with all these trials, the audience figures were virtually nothing as hardly anyone possessed a receiving set (Cornell, interview with author, 2003). Cornell (ibid) suggests by 1999 there were no more than 200 receivers of some sort across the whole of the UK and these mostly in the hands of those in the digital radio industry. As Jones (interview with author, 2014) says in the case of 5 Live Sports Plus:

> I can remember having a digital radio at home on a Saturday

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[401] ibid.
[402] ibid.
[403] ibid.

afternoon when there were hardly any digital radios, I had an R&D
machine connected to my stereo and knew I was probably the only
person listening to live coverage of some division two football match.

By 2000 these services were not enough. Proper mass audience serving programmes
were required in order to drive the uptake of the technology in homes. In a speech to the
Radio Festival in July 2001, Greg Dyke outlined his position on radio, describing how
he envisaged the future of the medium he had now become familiar with:

> Analogue radio is no longer able to provide the industry with a way of
> growing their business or provide listeners with more choice… outside
> of the media I have yet to meet a single listener with a digital radio…
> we've invested over £30 million of licence payers' money in digital radio
> and to be frank we've seen very little in return. So why are we so keen
>   on digital radio?... it's clear the internet can't replace broadcast radio for
> our core UK networks… digital radio is the only technology on offer that
> allows radio to grow. But there's still a long way to go before digital radio
> ceases to be just a technology and becomes a consumer product. Just like the
> commercial sector we're taking quite an expensive punt that digital radio will
> be central to the way radio is consumed in the future. But for it to succeed we
> have to find ways to get the price of receivers down… We are prepared to
> invest more. We can't use public money to directly subsidise receivers but we
> can invest in new, high quality services.[404]

Dyke's speech is interesting as it addresses a number of issues concerning the BBC's
position with regard to DAB. It consigns analogue radio to the dustbin of media history,
thus finally putting pay to any assumptions that FM may persist as a preferred model or
that John Birt's idealised model of internet radio could represent the future of radio
broadcasting. Dyke's statement unequivocally reinforces the BBC's commitment to
DAB. At the same time however it highlights the fact that DAB penetration has not
been of sufficient viability to meet the BBC's significant investment thus far. It would
seem that the BBC may not wish to devote more public funding leverage towards DAB
but Dyke believed that the prohibitive price of receivers remained the last obstacle to

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[404] Public Service in a Digital World. Greg Dyke speech to the Radio Festival, 10 July 2001.
BBC Press Release.

DAB and therefore an investment in new services might help overcome this obstruction. As an introduction to his speech Dyke was not embarrassed to admit that as a 'television man' his understanding of radio was pretty limited when he took up the job of Director General almost two years previously yet his decision to continue with DAB and invest even more licence fee money towards it seems bold and categorical.

It can be argued that's Dyke's mission was in fact driven from within the BBC's own Radio division. Nelson (interview with author, 2003) recalls that Dyke indeed did not possess a great knowledge of radio and 'took his lead on the subject for the existing BBC Director of Radio, Jenny Abramsky,' and claims that it was Abramsky who had been trying to convince most of BBC management that DAB was the future of radio and that the provision of new services was essential if it was to succeed. Nelson (ibid) goes on to say that the change of Director General from John Birt to Greg Dyke in 2000 meant the end of the internet radio obsessive era of Birt and meant Abramsky's aspiration of new services was back on the agenda as Dyke was 'more susceptible to it.' Dyke himself admits Abramsky 'should get most of the credit for turning British radio digital' (Dyke 2005, p176) and he believes she was correct in her persistence:

> She persuaded, cajoled and threatened everyone inside the BBC to support the plan to develop a series of new BBC digital radio services. And it was the arrival of those services that finally persuaded the radio manufacturers to start producing digital radios (Dyke ibid).

Dyke is certain the eventual decision to spend £18 million a year on new digital radio services was the right decision (Dyke ibid).

While it may be logical to conclude that Abramsky was the driving force within the BBC to provide the new services which would then aid in the uptake of DAB, it could also be argued that in effect it was both Abramsky and Dyke who brought about the new crucial dimension to digital expansion, namely new digital specific channels. While Abramsky's motivations were centred on her desire to promote the medium of radio, Dyke's digital strategies were, as Born (2004, p486) notes, based on completely different assumptions:

> Birt's instinct had been to deploy digital for polar ends: on the one

hand commercial expansion, and on the other pure public service
purposes by attempting to reach underserved communities. Dyke
adopted a similar philosophy but took a more mainstream if resolutely
public service orientation, one peppered with pragmatism. To the
Reithian mission to inform, educate and entertain, Dyke added 'connect'.

Dyke's digital proposals ended up including a portfolio of five new digital radio networks and four complementary free-to-air DTV channels, so this was a digital package which included radio as much as television. Unlike the previous test services which had been transmitting at various times since the launch of the first DAB trial in 1995, the proposed stations which would be submitted to the DCMS needed to fulfil the BBC's public service remit to satisfy the government and provide content that would ultimately lure listeners and encourage them to invest in new receiving sets. The five national radio networks submitted included 5 Live Sports Extra, a continuation of 5 Live Sports Plus, a part-time network exploiting the BBC's sports rights to the full, as well as the Asian Network, an existing regional service which had been providing dedicated Asian programming across the Midlands. Three brand new services were also planned and at this stages went by the simple nomenclature of Networks X, Y and Z. Network X would be an off-shoot of Radio 1 and provide 'cutting edge black music'.[405] Network Y would provide music for an audience caught between Radio 1 and Radio 2[406] while Network Z would provide a mix of 'intelligent, fun, vintage and new shows for adults and children'.[407]

In the end the BBC got government approval to launch all its digital services as a whole and at the same time, 13 September 2001, which covered its range of five digital radio channels and three[408] of its four proposed television services.[409] The BBC described this point as 'putting an end to 8 months of uncertainty and opening up a new era of digital development'[410] thus considering it a turning point in its digital history and vindication

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[405] New Television and Radio Get Go-Ahead. *Ariel Digital Special*, 14 September 2001.
[406] ibid.
[407] ibid.
[408] BBC 3's approval by Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell would have to wait a little longer when it's revised proposals were eventually accepted.
[409] BBC Children's 1 (later named Cbeebies) for children under 6; BBC Children's 2 (later named CBBC) for children 6-13; BBC Choice (later named BBC 3) for a 16-34 audience and BBC 4 for cultural and factual programming.
[410] New Television and Radio Get Go-Ahead. *Ariel Digital Special,* 14 September 2001.

of its confidence on DAB. Dyke saw this as an enormously exciting time for the BBC as a whole, both television[411] and radio:

> There have been times in the BBC when there has been expansion, this is one of them… A lot of money is going into production to make a lot of new services… We are seeing the biggest increase in programming expenditure in the history of the BBC. Between 2000 and 2002 we will will have increased spending by £450 million.[412]

Abramsky, perhaps unsurprisingly, focussed on the importance of radio and the new radio services:

> I am really heartened that the secretary of state emphasised the important role that BBC radio has to play in driving digital take-up and that she saw our services as distinctive and adding to our public service remit.[413]

Tessa Jowell shared Abramsky's confidence in the key role radio in particular would play in digital expansion in the UK. In a speech to the Royal Television Society on the day of the announcement of the new services[414] she expressed her hope that the BBC could now play to its historic PSB strengths in promoting Britain's digital environment:

> More than any other institution the BBC has the capacity to build the the digital radio market. It is proposing to offer distinctive and attractive new services to audiences not currently well served across the UK. A strong BBC presence on digital radio should increase listeners and further encourage manufacturers to bring new products on the market at prices that people can afford.

Jowell recognised that digital take-up of radio had been painfully slow despite the fact the BBC had been offering a service for the past six years, less than 40,000 sets had been sold during this time and the exorbitant price tag of £300 was certainly a major

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[411] For more analysis of digital television in Britain see Starks (2007).
[412] New Television and Radio Get Go-Ahead. *Ariel Digital Special,* 14 September 2001.
[413] ibid.
[414] Public Service Broadcasting in the Digital Age and the New BBC Services. Speech by Tessa Jowell to the Royal Television Society, Cambridge, 13 September 2001.

disincentive. Jowell's holy grail was a set retailing at £99 and hoped such a set would be available for the Christmas market of 2001.[415] Commercial operators involved in set manufacture did not believe this was feasible and Jowell was probably being over optimistic as although the new BBC services had been approved, they would not roll out until 2002. By this time Network X would become BBC 1Xtra,[416] Network Y would become BBC 6 Music[417] and Network Z becoming BBC 7.[418] A curious aspect of the new services was that the word 'radio' was missing from the station names, this representing a continuation of the BBC's emphasis on 'platform neutrality' or in other words, multi-platform presence.

By virtue of the fact that there were literally millions of analogue radio sets across the UK[419] and only 40,000 digital sets sold far, the setting of analogue switch-off date was not a feasible option but the BBC still believed that at some point in the next 10 years digital would become the only way in which UK television and radio programmes would be broadcast. Evidence suggested the UK already had fastest rate of digital take-up in Europe with about one third of homes now receiving digital programming of some sort.[420]

Rudin (2006) argues that by 2004, two years after the launch of its new services, the BBC had accepted that improved sound quality had been far less important than the increase in programme choice for DAB to be a success. Rudin bases his claim on the BBC's submission to a DCMS review of DAB performance where the BBC was able to claim:

> the extension of listening choice was fundamental to driving take up of
> DAB, with wider choice consistently cited by digital radio owners as the
> main reason for buying sets.[421]

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[415] ibid.

[416] BBC 1Xtra launched 16 August 2002.

[417] BBC 6 Music launched 11 March 2002.

[418] BBC 7 launched 15 December 2002. Relaunched as BBC Radio 4 Extra on 2 April 2011.

[419] A 2003 BBC Report estimated the figure to be 33 million. BBC Digital Homes Project Report, 18 June 2003.

[420] New Television and Radio Get Go-Ahead. *Ariel Digital Special,* 14 September 2001.

[421] DCMS Review of DAB Digital Radio – The BBC Submission, London, 2004.

But surely the BBC had accepted the fact that new services were more important than sound quality quite a few years before this? It was after all the reasoning behind the desire to create new content in the first place and Rudin overlooks the fact that Liz Forgan had first identified the importance of new content even as far back as 1996.

The BBC's decision to pursue DAB was proven to be correct and its decision to provide new services was deemed to be auspicious, more new national BBC services had been launched over the course of 2002/03 than at any point in the corporation's history. Chairman Gavin Davies was able to highlight the success of the new services in the BBC Annual Report for 2003; BBC Radio's new digital stations had added 400,000 new listeners, reaching out to a record 53.5% of the total radio audience and earmarked BBC 7 which in its first week achieved 920,000 page impressions on its website, the highest launch figure for any of the new services.[422]

Conclusion

Only a year after the launch of new digital services, the consumption of digital media in Britain had taken a firm foothold but it was clear further challenges lay ahead. While radio and television would still dominate digital, broadcast media consumption, there was on the horizon a potential fragmentation and polarisation of the younger audience who were beginning to embrace different media consumption models including mobiles, consoles and PCs thus shifting away from traditional patterns. This was already evident from market research into digital listening which revealed that only 0.4 million people were listening via DAB while 13 million were employing other platforms such as digital television or live streaming and on-demand listening via the internet.[423] Such fragmentation, it was feared, could once again threaten the BBC's market share and this was backed up by the same research which showed that as listeners moved from analogue to digital, the BBC's audience share fell by 10%.[424]

The timing of the BBC's digital initiation could not have been more propitious. During the course of 2003 the Government was preparing to review first the BBC's online

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[422] BBC Annual Report 2002/2003. BBC Publications, July 2003.
[423] BBC Digital Homes Project: Joint Marketing & Communications/Strategy & Distribution Report, 18 June 2003.
[424] ibid.

services and then its digital services on TV and radio. Also the new regulator, OFCOM, was planning to review the BBC's public service remit in 2004 and charter renewal was looming in 2006. This prompted Tessa Jowell to pose the question 'What is the BBC for?'[425] This set off a bout of insecurity within the BBC about whether the long and intense digital journey had been worth it if the corporation was now under attack from the government. The BBC was able to find comfort in quoting the supportive words of people like the radio critic Gillian Reynolds:[426]

> Look at how BBC radio has kept ahead of its commercial rivals and in tune with its audiences. By offering value added rather than cut rate novelty by providing both choice and quality. Jenny Abramsky's role in keeping radio as the kind of BBC that the widest section of the population knows, loves and respects and would find irreplaceable deserves urgent study.[427]

It may be pertinent to question what was the role of PSB in the digital era and particularly in relation to the role of the commercial sector since some might argue there is a case for limiting public service involvement in new digital media in order to allow commercial operators greater freedom to develop viable businesses in a new digital environment (Steemers 2004). If that is the case, what can be discerned as the BBC's role in fulfilling its PSB remit? In response one can posit the notion that it essentially complied with the government's wish for digital switchover by promising to take the lead on building digital Britain with a planned TV switchover by 2012 (Steemers 2004). Transition towards digital technology and implementation of new services is of course costly. Yet PSB's attempts to increase supplementary commercial sources of finance were bound to bring them into conflict with commercial rivals fearing cross-subsidy from public funds and unfair competition, which makes it difficult to redefine publicly funded PSB in the light of a digitally converging media environment, and requires a leap of faith to rethink the concept of PSB in order to reflect changes in content, access and distribution. It is true the drive to digital necessarily forced the BBC to look at the potentiality of commercial activities, secondary markets and partnerships to enable it to supplement public funding and participate in digital distribution and services. In this the

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[425] What Is The BBC For? Speech by Culture Secretary, Tessa Jowell, at Edinburgh Television Festival, August 2003.
[426] Radio critic of *The Daily Telegraph* since 1975.
[427] *Ariel*, 6 April, 2004.

BBC was encouraged first by a Conservative then a Labour government, to be more commercial in its approach to the introduction of new channels and the exploitation of its brand worldwide. So, enhancing commercial revenue became a significant strand of BBC corporate strategy. Indeed the bulk of the BBC's digital investment in the 1990s came from the licence fee, spending £154 million (or 7% of total licence fee income) on all digital services in 1998/99.[428] The need to divert this significant amount of licence fee money away from technology and towards the actual core business of programme making meant that new Culture Secretary Chris Smith[429] began considering options for allowing BBC to supplement the licence fee with ideas such as advertising on digital only stations or a digital supplement to the licence fee itself, none of which came into being, but the new Labour government was nevertheless keen on following the previous Conservative government's 1994 white paper on *The Future of the BBC*[430] which encouraged the BBC's evolution into an 'international multimedia enterprise' (Steemers 1999).

The BBC may be seen as the UK's digital radio champion for the most part of the 1990s, particularly in running the UK's first DAB trial and attempting to proselytize the manufacturing industry. One can argue that the BBC's reticence on blatant DAB promotion over the latter years of the 1990s and the availability of a national commercial multiplex meant that the commercial sector acted as digital champion for a crucial period.[431] But there is no doubt the BBC's salient role re-emerged with the launch of new services in 2002. It was these new services which really caught the attention of the manufacturers and it is no surprise that the Pure Evoke radio, retailing at £99, arrived on the market at the same time.[432] Jones (interview with author, 2014) claims at this point the manufacturers and the retailers came firmly on board, so much so that they 'insisted the radio industry did not now change its mind on DAB as they anticipated a long-term potential revenue.'

Hendy (2000b) succinctly concludes that it would appear that large national public-service broadcasters, with their strategic ability to invest in long-term research and

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[428] BBC Annual Report and Accounts 1998/99.
[429] Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport, 2 May 1997 - 8 June 2001.
[430] White Paper: The Future of the BBC. July 1994. Cm. 2621. London HMSO.
[431] See Chapter 6.
[432] Pure, Press Release, 1 July 2002. http://www.pure.com/press-release/videologic-announces-first-pound99-dab-digital-radio-292/

without the need to deliver an immediate return of large audiences to advertisers, have been central to the early development of DAB, with commercial operators following in their wake and we shall examine precisely how those commercial operators performed in the next chapter but is apt to end on Hendy's (ibid) conclusion that 'digitalization is thus cast as the end-game of deregulation.'

Chapter 6

Commercial Radio and DAB

Having studied the BBC's policy towards DAB and the reasons which drove its predilection, it is now appropriate to examine the approach of the commercial radio sector in order to uncover its attitude towards this new form of digital radio technology.

As it played an important role in the developmental stage of DAB, it would seem that the BBC's interest was fostered at a very early stage in the technology's life cycle, with this eventually progressing into a full scale policy direction. As regards the commercial sector, it had no involvement in the developmental stage and indeed no participative role in the gestation of DAB until the early 1990s when it began to take notice of the technology's key attributes. In this chapter therefore the central question must be why did the commercial sector decide to embrace DAB? To answer this one must examine what were the characteristics of DAB which the commercial sector found particularly attractive in terms of its audience and its core business model, and what were the peculiar influences which held sway. Moving on from the early motivation factors, one then has to examine how the commercial sector, on accepting DAB, made the technology a channel of opportunity thus making DAB work for the success of the sector itself.

The chapter begins by looking at previous technological advances in radio and how they affected commercial radio companies, in order to provide an historical perspective before moving on to DAB. Up until 1996 I suggest that the commercial sector took a back seat as the BBC drove the presence of DAB in the UK. However, during this time the commercial sector was gaining an understanding of the new technology, albeit while not actively pursuing it. From 1996, and particularly following the publication of the Broadcasting Act in that year, the commercial sector began to take on a more active, participative role, seeking to likewise promote DAB as a platform for the future of radio. I will argue that during these years, and especially with the arrival of the national multiplex for INR, the commercial sector, and particularly certain players in that industry, adopted the position of 'digital champion' for a period, picking up the baton from the BBC, moving in effect from back seat to driving seat. The chapter finishes by analysing the position of DAB in the commercial sector at the beginning of the 2000s and questions if it had any prominent effect on the position of the commercial radio industry in the UK.

Before the legalised introduction of commercial radio in the UK in 1973, the era of the pirates in the 1960s was the last to represent a serious challenge to the BBC's monopoly. This pirate era in Britain was also accompanied by a significant development in radio receiving technology, namely the emergence of the transistor. As a piece of technology, the transistor had been created by scientists at the Bell Laboratories in the USA in 1947 as a replacement for the existing valve technology within radio receivers. The miniaturized size of the transistor meant that manufacturers could now make sets that were lighter, smaller, more portable and cheaper than their predecessors and since they used less power, could also make more economical use of batteries (Crisell 2003a, p5) and it was the Japanese electronics manufacturers who introduced the pocket sized transistor radio[433] which ultimately 'defined the radio listening model of the 1960s' (Basalla 1988, p86). For radio manufacturers there was little convincing required as in economic terms the sheer difference in scale and cost between the transistor and its predecessor, the valve, provided all the necessary benefits they required in order to initiate mass production (Partner 1999, p200).

The success of pirate radio in Britain is often cited as being down to a combination of two factors which appeared at the same time, namely: the transistor radio and a new wave of British popular music (Boyd 1986, Kemppainen 2009). In terms of sound quality, transistors offered little in the way of any discernable improvement to the existing valve technology (Lindsay et al 2009, p223) but the selling point was their portability which readily complemented a changing youth music culture and was adopted voraciously by youth in their attempt to construct a 'distinctive social space' (Marshall 1997, p155). This notion of portability having a direct cultural influence on radio is however disputed by Wall and Webber (2014, p128) who claim the very idea of transistor radio as a transformative technology is misleading:

> The mobility that is often understood to be a direct influence of the transistor already existed as a cultural imperative… The transistor radio was a key item of technology for cultural agents to exploit rather than an agent of change in itself… Equally important were the shifts in economics…

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[433] Due to its success in this market Sony is often misidentified as the inventor as the transistor radio (Partner 1999, p194).

and these changes required radio executives to seek out a new purpose and format for radio.

In other words Wall and Webber believe transistor technology did not in itself drive change but rather worked successfully in tandem with other factors to promote a cultural change in radio listening. Wall and Webber cite the example of economic factors whereby increased wealth meant people could replace radio listening with television watching thus requiring a change in the nature of radio output in order to ensure its survival, and transistor technology merely complemented this. To a point Wall and Webber may be accurate as it is also possible to argue that television itself may have helped drive the preponderance of the transistor radio through simply similarly embracing the emergent youth music culture, thus aiding radio's status (Peterson 1990).

While such economic factors may come into play, the transistor's role as a major technological amelioration cannot be underestimated, although one can argue it was a technology that worked in tandem with a cultural dynamic in the form of a radically altered popular music landscape which occurred in the 1960s, as Schultze et al (1991, p167) argue:

> When teenagers discovered they could listen to *their* music on new transistor radios, everything took off. This ubiquitousness helped make rock and roll a powerful mode of communication in contemporary culture.

Millard (2012, p163) goes further and highlights the role of the transistor in shaping the musical culture itself; 'The transistor radio and camera were the machines that powered Beatlemania' while Fickers (2009, p124) proposes a longer term influence by revealing that 'popular music provides a treasure of lyrics that deal explicitly with the transistor radio'.[434]

The question which we need to ask is how symbiotic was the relationship between the pirates and the transistor? Kemppainen (2009) claims that by the beginning of the 1960s this new, small, electronic component had made it possible to 'create a whole new role for radio' but goes on to clarify that it was not only the technology that created the new

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[434] Fickers gives examples ranging from Chuck Berry to The Beach Boys to Kraftwerk.

radio but the role of the emergent social force in the shape of youth culture, with its music, also had a huge role to play. This 'whole new role for radio' was one grasped by the pirates simply because they had the wherewithal and the flexibility to provide a popular music service targeting young people listening on transistor sets (Skues and Kindred 2014). Wharton (2015, p42) concludes that:

> Listening to the illegal pirate radio became an aspect of teenage identity…
> it became a signifier of independence from the parent culture. It also provided
> a targeted route for advertisers into a specific demographic sector and helped
> encourage a developing market based youth culture.

The role of the transistor in this process was essential, it offered the characteristics described by Wharton and became a *signifier* (Moores 2005, p104) of that youth culture. It is important to note that in the relationship between transistor technology and the nascent rock and roll musical genre, there is no evidence which might assume a pro-active dimension between transistor radio set manufacturers and music business entrepreneurs to further each other's interests for mutual benefit. Both were huge phenomena with their own impetus, as Crisell (2002a, p125) concludes; 'how convenient, then, that the arrival of rock music should coincide with that of the transistor'. It is however possible to highlight the complementary nature of the new youth music and pirate radio, with the former essentially driving the latter. From this it is then easy to describe the technology of pirate radio, the transistor, as a 'part of the narrative which constitutes a cultural identity' (Van Der Hoeven 2012).

Due to the fact that the transistor represents part of a triumvirate (along with a new musical genre and new broadcasting platform in form of pirate radio) which worked together to create an environment which benefitted all, one can ask if this picture is due to the push of technology or the pull of consumer needs i.e. 'technology push' or 'demand pull'? (Flichy 2007, p19). But Schiffer (1993) believes another model may apply in this instance and proposes a 'cultural imperative' model[435] which he defines as 'a product fervently believed to be desirable and inevitable and merely awaiting technological means for its realization'. Indeed this is a model which could equally be applied in the 1980s and 1990s with the arrival of the Walkman (Du Gay et al 2013).

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[435] Schiffer applies this to what he terms the 'shirt pocket' radio, a term he employs for the transistor radio.

Either way, the arrival of the transistor had a long reaching effect on the UK radio industry. A flourishing youth culture led to the arrival of the pirate stations to satisfy the needs of that audience and both these two blossomed under transistor technology which neatly brought them together in a circular construct. These factors fortuitously emerged at the same time and from their combination the pirate stations flourished, but it would be inaccurate to assume that the pirates in any way drove the new technology. As Rudin (2007) concludes:

> Two major developments saved radio as a mass, popular medium: the transistor radio which made it more mobile and the 'pirate' stations which were in the vanguard of a challenge to the post-war political consensus by providing an alternative model of free enterprise and libertarianism.

A later technological development embraced by commercial radio was FM. When commercial radio in the UK was legalised in the early 1970s many stations such as London's Capital Radio opted for a US-style FM format. Sterling (2004, p2380) claims this was because the management of these new stations felt the early vitality of Top 40 radio had now dissipated and was seen as 'embarassingly unsophisticated and uncool' so these stations attempted a US West Coast FM-style format. Sterling (ibid) cites this as a style favoured by some DJs of the time and gives the example of Johnny Walker (ex Radio Caroline and Radio England) who in a protest at what he was being forced to play, left Britain at the height of his popularity in 1976 to work on San Francisco's 'free-form' FM station KSAN.[436]

When ILR first launched in 1973 it broadcast its services on both FM and AM, following a pattern of simulcasting which the BBC was also pursuing.[437] It can be argued that this simulcasting on two wavebands may have held back the more widespread penetration of FM until the 1980s when both the BBC and the commercial stations were forced by the government[438] to end simulcasting and instead offer different services on their FM and AM wavelengths. Before this, listeners beyond the audio equipment aficionado did not feel compelled to invest in an FM set, but the

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[436] See Walker 2007 (Chapter 27).
[437] All ILR contracts included a FM and AM frequency allocation (Street 2006, p37).
[438] The Government's 1987 Green Paper Radio Choices and Opportunities (Cm 92) proposed an end to such simulcasting.

creation of separate FM only stations made this an almost necessary move. Also, in 1990 the Radio Authority began to license more local FM only stations which sought to cater for diverse audience groups.[439] In the late 1980s both commercial radio and the BBC were therefore beginning to offer different services on FM and AM so listeners now had to buy a set capable of receiving both AM and FM if they wanted to access the full range of services. As transistor technology had brought down the price of radio receiving sets and could be used for both AM and FM reception, the cost of purchase of a new set by the 1980s was no more prohibitive than that for existing sets. The continued growth of music radio in the UK, largely at the hands of new commercial stations, combined with the gradually falling price of FM receivers (increasingly in small portable transistor radios) helped contribute to the inexorable rise of FM radio.

Commercial radio success into the 1990s on FM led operators to press for the BBC to hand over one of its FM frequencies such as Radio 4's FM (Hendy 2007, p293) and this led the BBC to genuinely fear the prospect of continued commercial pressure on its spectrum space and certainly a definite way of dealing with this would be to seek a method of attaining greater spectrum security, and DAB was readily perceived as such a solution.[440] For some within the commercial sector the struggle with the BBC over FM frequency space was becoming irksome and DAB was imagined by the newly created Radio Authority in 1990 as representing 'the chance to get even' (Stoller 2010, p275). The BBC had retained the best AM frequencies and dominated the FM bands. DAB would even the score in the mindset of the Radio Authority which then set about a process of technical planning for the introduction of DAB for commercial radio in the UK in an attempt to overcome what the Radio Authority's Director of Engineering, Mark Thomas, saw as 'the failing of analogue broadcasting for the commercial sector' (Thomas 1995).

DAB was to represent more than a simple technology resolution however. It could also play a role in creating a greater diversification of content. The Government's 1987 Green Paper, *Radio Choices and Opportunities*[441] proposed an end to simulcasting as part of a move to fuel a major expansion in independent radio services in Britain. This was done to end simulcasting by both BBC and ILR because although ILR had been

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[439] Examples in London included stations like Kiss FM, Choice FM and Jazz FM.
[440] Digital Audio Broadcasting Update Report, April 1994. BBC WAC: Digital Audio Broadcasting G080-006.
[441] Green Paper: Radio Choices and Opportunities. Cm 92, 1987.

conceived as an FM service, in the early 1980s most radio listening was still done through AM and in order to give fledgling services a better chance, they were allocated AM frequencies. What this meant for most stations was they made their FM service target a younger audience and broadcast a 'gold' service for over 35s on AM. This helped commercial radio target audiences more effectively than they had been able to in the past. But despite the growth of commercial radio in the 1990s many stations chose to target the exact same audience, the one identified by advertisers as having the most spending power, namely the younger pop music audience. This meant that in the 1990s, although there were more radio stations than before, most of them were targeting the same audience and so sounded very similar. Tacchi (2000) cites research which supports the notion that broadcasting in the UK in the mid-1990s was suffering from 'a lack of innovation in and increasing blandness of local commercial radio.' In order to continue growth and at the same time broaden the variation of content, commercial radio would require even more stations and by the mid-1990s it was clear the amount of spectrum available on FM would not serve these ambitions.

The Early to Mid 1990s: Taking a Back Seat

We have seen how DAB emerged as the new radio broadcasting technology in the late 1980s and early 1990s and how it was driven by the BBC during this early stage but it is important to gauge the reaction of the commercial sector during this period. We also know a major issue for the radio industry in general, which had been recognised since the commercial stations came on air in 1973, was that of the shortage of available spectrum and its implications.[442] For commercial radio this translated into a concern that the BBC had more than its fair share of frequency space on both AM and FM bands and this led the former to demand the surrender of some BBC frequency space, particularly on FM.[443] Commercial radio's concern over a lack of spectrum found some relief however in ongoing research which pointed to its healthy status in terms of audience figures with the number of commercial stations increasing to the point where

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[442] Why Radio is Running Out of Airwaves. *New Scientist*, 8 April 1982.
[443] Even by the end of the decade the BBC still held 59% of the FM spectrum (Cooper-Chen 2005, p53).

the BBC had steadily been losing listening share to commercial competitors over the previous 20 years.[444]

A cursory inspection revealed that DAB offered to resolve the long-standing spectrum problem and at the same time permit the commercial sector to expand its presence, particularly against the BBC, and thus a survey of DAB was set in motion. As early as 1990 the Radio Authority began a process of technical planning for the introduction of DAB in the commercial sector (Stoller 2010, p275). The AIRC also established a DAB committee which first met on 30 August 1991. From this meeting one can ascertain that the companies were keen on the idea of DAB and what potential benefits it might bring, but there was also a note of caution regarding DAB penetration as exemplified by Peter Jackson, the Chief Engineer at Capital Radio:

> Stations should be allowed to simulcast DAB programmes with their AM
> and FM programmes until they determine sufficient DAB penetration has
> been achieved to rely on it as the sole transmission medium.[445]

These early steps culminated in the Radio Authority's first policy statement released in October 1992:

> The Radio Authority believes that DAB is the single most significant
> advance in sound radio transmission technology since the development
> of FM broadcasting; its impact is likely to be even greater than that of FM.[446]

This represented the commercial sector's first formal stance on DAB and goes some way to suggest an unconditional support for DAB broadcasting and the future place of that technology in the UK radio industry. But how far does this commitment go beyond mere words? The BBC thought it was no more than a statement of intent but without any foundation in the form of action, in fact in reacting, the BBC believed that this statement did not reflect the more realistic position which was that at this stage the required transmitter investment cost for the commercial stations would be wholly

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[444] RAJAR 2014.

[445] AIRC, DAB Committee minutes, 30 August 1991.

[446] Initial Policy Statement on Digital Audio Broadcasting. Radio Authority, October 1992.

prohibitive.[447] The BBC took its analysis a step further, concluding that ILR and INR stations would fear the fact that DAB would bring new competition rather than additional income and that it was therefore:

> in the best interests of ILR/INR to prevent or slow the introduction of DAB regardless of any benefits it may bring consumers. If the Radio Authority and/or the BBC do not push for DAB, inaction would probably be the highest reward strategy for ILR/INR… Although ILR/INR and the AIRC are being very positive about DAB, when the time comes, actions may not match words.[448]

The BBC's analysis may be considered quite scathing but it was eager to gauge the commercial sector's genuine commitment to a process which would require its presence if DAB was to succeed as a future platform for the entire UK radio industry. Throughout 1993 and 1994 it was deemed the commercial sector's stance had not changed. The AIRC continued with its support for DAB in public but BBC research suggested genuine support remained lukewarm particularly amongst ILRs although one particular report paints a more positive picture at INR level by claiming that Virgin Radio had expressed an interest in having a national DAB service and, if the BBC were to decide to launch a national service, they may want to start at a similar time.[449] For the BBC, as the UK's digital pioneer, this was the first encouraging feedback from a major player within the industry and encouraged the corporation to continue on-going discussions with both the Radio Authority and individual INR stations in a two-pronged strategy 'to develop UK DAB services.'[450]

The envisaged changing radio landscape was appreciated by both the BBC and the commercial companies at the beginning of the 1990s, not just for each in relation to the other but in terms of a general picture for the medium as a whole. BBC research predicted that over the course of the decade, general competition for radio listeners' time would increase and this would not just come from within the BBC/commercial

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[447] DAB: A Market Analysis, BBC Policy & Planning Document, 5 October 1992. BBC WAC E120-014 Part 1 Digital Audio Broadcasting – Project Group.
[448] ibid.
[449] Digital Audio Broadcasting: A Note by Henry Price, BBC Engineering, 10 December 1993. BBC WAC: Digital Audio Broadcasting G080-006.
[450] Digital Audio Broadcasting Report, 29 September 1994. BBC WAC: G080-006 Digital Audio Broadcasting.

sector dynamic, resulting from an increase in the number of stations. Instead, alternative services, particularly in relation to music, would also represent a wider threat - these included cable and satellite television, CD technology and embryonic alternative technologies such as video on demand.[451] Howard (interview with author, 2004) agrees these concerns were also at the forefront of the minds of some within the commercial sector 'who had an eye on the idea of future consolidation within the radio market.' It was thought the proportion of households which would be in a position to receive alternative music services would increase by more than 50% over the following ten years.[452] For the commercial sector it was now becoming important to analyse what DAB could offer in this scenario and to that end both representatives of the Radio Authority and the AIRC attended a BBC DAB seminar at Kingswood Warren in late 1994, outlining the BBC's own plans and expectations.[453]

Stoller (2010, p277) claims that by this time both the Radio Authority and BBC had firmly 'nailed their colours to the mast' regarding their stance on DAB but it is important to recognise that the Radio Authority's posture existed only in policy and not in practice and there was not yet a concerted cross-industry drive towards DAB, in effect the BBC was still leading and the commercial sector merely following. In 1994 the Radio Authority commissioned a study from GEC-Marconi into how the DAB spectrum might be exploited.[454] Stoller (ibid) claims this report caused friction among ILRs over the costs which would be involved in switching to DAB transmitters in order to create new services. To resolve this dispute the Radio Authority decided the local DAB areas should replicate existing analogue areas thus avoiding the cost of new transmitters: this would be cost effective and give the ILRs the opportunity to 'dominate digital radio' at the local level (Stoller ibid). So the commercial sector was beginning to embrace a more combative approach in seeking out a position of strength. Taking on a slightly more pro-active role was evident at the July 1995 International Telecommunications Union conference in Wiesbaden where a solution was arrived at which would free spectrum for the eventual seven DAB frequencies in the UK[455] and Stoller (ibid, p278) claims the Radio Authority played a very active role as part of the UK delegation. As time went on the BBC feared the worst possible reaction of the

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[451] ibid.

[452] ibid.

[453] 6th December 1994. BBC WAC: G001-005-002 Digital Audio Broadcasting – General.

[454] Radio Authority, Annual Report, December 1994.

[455] 1 for BBC national, 1 for INR and 5 for combined BBC local/ILR.

commercial sector would be that of losing completely the existing interest it had and ultimately declining to become involved in the DAB process[456] but it would appear that the commercial sector had bought into the potential advantages of pursuing DAB and as we have already pointed out, but is worth repeating, another salient factor which was critical to the commercial sector's tentative steps towards DAB around 1995 was the undeniable fact that commercial radio was now in the ascendancy. The number of commercial stations had leapt from less than 50 in the mid-1980s to over 150 by the mid-1990s (Hendy 2000a, p25) but the most significant aspect of commercial radio's success and one that would give it the necessary confidence to pursue a DAB strategy was that by 1995 its share of the audience overtook that of the BBC for the first time (Hendy ibid, Street 2002, p131, Lax 2012, p483). The commercial sector, if it was still sitting in the back regarding DAB, then at least by now was reaching into the front.

Lax (2014) believes there existed within the commercial sector during these planning years of the 1990s a general, altruistic interest in radio developments, including technology. He goes on to make a curious observation, stating:

> Commercial radio was to be included in the early development of digital
> radio. However, the DAB system did not accommodate commercial radio
> as readily as its public service counterpart.

It is Lax's idea that it was the DAB system that did not accommodate commercial radio rather than the other way round, which would seem to imply that during the early stage of development of DAB in Britain, the new technology did not match the very raison d'etre of commercial radio. We know that across Europe it was a technology promoted by public service broadcasters (O'Neill 2010, Hendy 2000a, Lax 2009) since they possessed the required wherewithal to encourage its development, but Lax's observation forces us to re-examine the commercial sector's initial reticent foray into DAB as being due to the very nature of DAB technology itself as opposed to being the result of the commercial sector's own decision-making process.

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[456] Digital Audio Broadcasting: Strategy & Business Plan 14, July 1995. BBC WAC: E120-014 Part 1 Digital Audio Broadcasting – Project Group.

Addressing a commercial radio convention held in Dublin in 1995 Stoller, in his newly appointed position as Chief Executive of the Radio Authority, feared that commercial companies were still too unaware of DAB:

> If it happens, DAB is going to be the major most important single development for radio since the transistor. So while I don't want you to abandon any of your natural commercial caution, you have got to understand DAB and get excited about it. Perhaps above all, you have got to understand how important may be the statutory framework and administrative context for DAB.[457]

What is striking about Stoller's contribution is the continuing seed of doubt reflected in those first few words 'If it happens.' He goes on to explain that the eventual long term government intention will be to turn off analogue so it is crucial that commercial stations understand the implications of this and where that will leave them if they don't 'get to grips with the implications of the details of DAB.' Stoller also told those assembled that he had informed the government of the Radio Authority's desire to build on the strengths of the analogue system by simply replicating and extending ILR and INR into the DAB domain, predicting that FM will continue to hold its position of prominence until at least 2008. In fact one of the Radio Authority's main areas of contention with the government's DAB plans was that for ILR at least, FM frequencies should be preserved indefinitely even after digital radio was established.[458]

It is important to note that by late 1995 the commercial sector was taking tentative practical steps to embrace DAB to a certain extent. So in November 1995 the nine local commercial stations in Birmingham became the first UK independent companies to transmit on a live DAB system. NTL launched the transmissions on Thursday 9 November at the Sound Broadcasting Equipment Show in the city with plans to run future experimental services in London and elsewhere in the UK. In historical terms, these Birmingham transmissions are important in that, although short lived, they mark the first significant launch of DAB for commercial radio and reveal a decision within the sector to enter the DAB fray. At the same time the challenge facing the commercial

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[457] Tony Stoller, Chief Executive Radio Authority. Speech to Commercial Radio Convention, Dublin, 1995.
[458] *Broadcast*, 27 October 1995.

stations was evident from market research carried out by Chrysalis[459] around the same time to gauge public reaction to DAB. In a sample of 200 adults, only 38% had heard of the concept of digital radio although 58% went on to say they would be prepared to buy a new set in order to get digital services. This led Chrysalis to conclude that DAB was a leap in the dark but while at the same time insisting it had the potential to become the new industry standard.[460] As 1996 arrived there was a feeling that the commercial sector could and should build on its success, not just in terms of the increasing range of services it could provide but also in terms of its increased audience share vis-à-vis the BBC. Of course the growth of the sector would mean increased competition between companies but with an expected emphasis on radio as a lucrative advertising medium as well, 'then this period of growth should be seized upon.'[461]

This early phase, from 1995 Lax (2014) calls the 'implementation period', with an emphasis on preparing the ground for full DAB services to begin but in this process of becoming aligned with a general UK DAB strategy the 1996 Broadcasting Act would play a crucial role. Stoller (2010, p278-279) offers a concise study of the role of government at this point. He claims it was digital broadcasting's good fortune that Virginia Bottomley took over at the Department of National Heritage, thus introducing the necessary legislation for the UK's digital broadcasting future. A White Paper,[462] the prelude to the 1996 Broadcasting Act, laid out plans for a nationwide digital radio service based on the Government's newly-launched terrestrial Digital Audio Broadcasting system although this system mostly applied to television (Goodwin 2005, p137). Regarding the discussions around digital television, commentators were able to employ superlatives such as 'a new digital revolution' (Levy 1999, Starks 2013) in terms of new services, improved quality, interactivity and so forth but another bonus of digital broadcasting was that it offered the chance to sell off spectrum to the telecommunications industry, creating therefore a 'digital dividend.' Of course radio offered no such 'digital dividend' and Stoller (2010, p279) identifies three reasons for this: its band space was not a similarly valuable commodity; DAB sound quality was proving to be as good as a robust FM reception but no more so, and also because there did not appear to be any imminent prospect of turning off the analogue radio signal.

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[459] Owner of 100.7 Heart FM in Birmingham.
[460] Tony Stoller, Chief Executive Radio Authority. Speech to Commercial Radio Convention, Dublin, 1995.
[461] Tony Stoller, Chief Executive, Radio Academy. *The Independent*, 2 January 1996.
[462] White Paper Digital Terrestrial Broadcasting: The Government's Proposals. August 1995, Cm. 2946, London, HMSO.

The strong message emanating from the government at the beginning on 1996 on how it wanted the media picture to change under the auspices of the forthcoming Broadcasting Act cannot be underestimated. Heritage Secretary, Virginia Bottomley made clear how she wanted all broadcasters to embrace new technology while appreciating that this would involve a long-term risk investment on the part of British media companies.[463] Bottomley went on to point out that media ownership proposals contained within the Act would aid in this process by ensuring continued competition and plurality of ownership which she insisted would help broadcasters to:

> Serve viewers and listeners, not marauding monopolists. Broadcasting is too powerful and pervasive a medium to give control to any one organisation.[464]

Reading between the lines it is possible to conclude that the government is telling the commercial companies to extend their role and take a more leading role in the UK media industry, including in the launch of digital platforms, but one can argue that the 1996 Broadcasting Act facilitated this more prominent function for the commercial sector and as the actual Bill made its way through parliament, the future position of commercial radio was becoming more and more attractive.

The Late 1990s: In the Driving Seat

The UK National DAB Forum released its first formal news briefing during the summer of 1996 where it confidently heralded radio as:

> Moving forward into the digital age with UK manufacturers, public and independent broadcasters, trade bodies and regulatory agencies working to bring DAB to the consumer.[465]

The news briefing goes on to claim receiving set manufacturers are now fully on board with DAB plans and cites Grundig, with whom the Commercial Radio Companies

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[463] Virginia Bottomley, Heritage Secretary. *The Guardian*, 15 January 1996.
[464] ibid.
[465] UK National DAB Forum, News Briefing. Launch Issue, Summer 1996.

Association (CRCA)[466] had recent discussions where Grundig claimed it was the first company in the world to put DAB receivers into pilot production with 5000 sets[467] in an initial batch for global trial.[468] The description of the design of this particular receiver highlights a major area of contention for DAB at this time, namely its sheer size, particularly when compared with analogue transistor sets. The Grundig receiver for example was too large to fit into a car dashboard and instead would need to be placed in the car boot and operated remotely from a standard car radio panel.[469] When asked about the glaring issue of receiving set dimensions, Grundig admitted that it did not foresee a more portable set coming to market before 2000, simply because the technology for smaller sets did not yet exist.[470] Grundig's steps however were soon matched by other manufacturers, so that within 18 months there would be 12 companies competing in the production of DAB sets (Lembke 2002, p218).

One of the CRCA's first missions after its formation was to hold a DAB seminar to discuss the perceived significance of the technology for the commercial sector over the next ten years.[471] Mark Story (Programme Director, Virgin Radio) shared Virgin's enthusiasm for DAB while Mark Flanagan (Managing Director, Fox FM) however, expressed the reservations of the ILRs who felt unhappy with the fact that DAB multiplex broadcasting might allow the bigger radio companies to take control of local broadcasting. This sentiment represents a division between the INRs and ILRs over DAB, the former becoming increasingly keen while the latter becoming increasingly cautious, fearing increased competition and particularly from within the ILR sector itself. As well as the commercial radio companies, also present at the seminar was the transmission company NTL which had run the Birmingham trial in November 1995 and was able to report it had begun a longer term trial in London in March 1996 featuring a number of the London commercial stations, speaking of the launch, NTL's DAB Product Manager, Jon Trowdale, stated:

> DAB for commercial broadcasters has taken on new momentum

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[466] The Association of Independent Radio Companies (AIRC) was renamed the Commercial Radio Companies Association (CRCA) in May 1996. It became known as RadioCentre in July 2006 after merging with the Radio Advertising Bureau (RAB).
[467] Grundig DCR 100 car receiver.
[468] Meeting between CRCA and Brian Newell (General Manager, Grundig Car Audio). May 1996.
[469] ibid.
[470] ibid.
[471] CRCA Seminar on DAB, 15 May 1996.

due to the Broadcasting Bill and the incentive created for existing broadcasters to transmit digitally in the years ahead. There are opportunities for new and innovative programme formats and flexibility for digital only services. We want to help commercial radio explore the great opportunities presented by DAB while saving them the worry of technicalities.[472]

The trial London multiplex was of course simply a trial as few people possessed receivers during this period and the fact that stations were rotated on the multiplex on a monthly basis[473] meant it was not treasured as anything more by those stations, but it does illustrate that the commercial sector was actively exploring how the technology would operate, how it would sound and what benefits it might bring.

The Broadcasting Act eventually received Royal Assent on 24 July 1996 and this represented a significant milestone in the history of the commercial radio sector's relationship with DAB. It set out the framework for the permanent licensing and regulation of DAB in the UK, allowing for one national multiplex to be operated by the BBC and one operated by the national commercial companies, as well as provision for at least 26 local and regional multiplexes which would serve both BBC and commercial services at that level. The BBC was quick to add new sports commentary and parliament coverage services to its existing portfolio. For the commercial sector however it would take a little longer to launch its national multiplex. Since the existing INRs would have guaranteed places on the national commercial multiplex that meant there would be room for a further three additional services as well. It could be argued that what the Act offered in terms of the distribution of multiplexes was a parity of distribution for both the BBC and the commercial companies, so that in this post-FM era, the commercial sector would no longer be struggling against BBC dominance of frequencies but instead find itself 'on an equal platform' (Howard, interview with author, 2004) and be in a position to 'threaten the BBC's audience base' (Cave 1996).

The Act may be seen as a good thing for commercial radio as the INRs were guaranteed a slot on their own national multiplex and ILRs were to be offered their own highly attractive incentive. Those which decided to take their place on a local DAB multiplex

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[472] ibid.
[473] ibid.

would get an automatic eight year extension to their existing analogue licence. This was a key inducement for commercial companies, so much so that while many remained sceptical towards DAB, the idea of incentivising commercial stations to join DAB was according to Stoller (2010, p280) a 'deal breaker' but Stoller (ibid) admits this effectively *forced* the entire sector to become supporters of DAB despite any misgivings.

Regional multiplexes involved alliances between the big groups e.g. Talk Radio, Ginger Media Group and Clear Channel (Hendy 2000a, p54), thus we see the first steps of a commercial sector takeover by the big radio groups and the creation of a new commercial elite which would continue to dominate the sector for many years to come. It did however create a certain degree of tension as Rudin (2006) notes:

> the contrast in enthusiasm between small and large commercial companies
> for DAB was a feature from the time that it was being fully tested and
> promoted as a serious new technology which the industry had to come to
> terms with.

Another important dimension of the Act which facilitated the emergence of the big radio companies was the relaxation of media ownership limits which the government hoped would create a more competitive British media industry. This intention applied as much to the BBC as well as it was now encouraged to boost its commercial activities (Born 2004, p58) This new trend towards 'marketisation' (Levy 1999, p32) would completely alter the shape and strength of the commercial radio as big groups would come to dominate the sector in an overt battle against a more commercial BBC. The Act significantly liberalised the existing ownership model which had permitted media companies to hold only minority interests in different media. It brought in a greater degree of cross-media ownership and in the case of radio, it now allowed individual media companies to hold up to 15% of the radio sector (Dwyer 2010, p99). The government's intention of 'reducing regulation in order to improve efficiency for consumers' (Fleming 2003), which led to the eventual dominance of a small number of companies, meant that within ten years two companies, Emap and GCap would come to own 60% of all commercial radio listening (Aldridge 2007, p96). A main characteristic of the 1996 Act was therefore to substantially deregulate media ownership by removing existing restrictions while at the same time providing a statutory basis for digital

broadcasting - but did this have any influence on the commercial sector's decision to embrace DAB?

Certainly the government perceived that a deregulated market would provide security for the commercial sector to take the step and at the end of 1995, Virginia Bottomley was able to inform the Radio Authority of how she understood the strength of feeling that 'before investing in DAB, radio companies would need a greater security of tenure than was afforded by current licences'[474] and in order to assuage fears she pointed to the forthcoming Broadcasting Bill[475] which would rectify that. This had been a particular bugbear for the most successful INR, Classic FM, whose licence was due to expire in five years and who actively sought some form of long term stability if it is was to invest in digital technology.[476] Quentin Howard, who was head of engineering at GWR at the time, and thus responsible for that company's decisions on technology, believes DAB could only have become a possibility in the commercial sector as a result of the emergence of big players in the market (including his own) who had the 'capacity to take the risk' and who ultimately believed DAB provided a key 'attraction in building further market positioning against the BBC' (Howard, interview with author, 2004). Howard's claim is backed up by research by Berry and Waldfogel (2001) who argue that the 1996 Telecommunications Act in the USA, which facilitated mergers within the American radio industry, impacted on stations and formats by creating greater access and audiences.

Even before the Act came into force there were concerns among some commercial companies at the 'perceived powers that appeared to be in the hands of the multiplex providers and the comparative weakness of the licence holders.'[477] A large part of the regulation of programme content would now be in the hands of the multiplex owners, this along with automatic licence renewals and substantial durations for digital licences:

> Amounted to very generous concessions and has resulted in
> further consolidation of an already rapidly consolidating
> commercial radio system (Rudin 2006).

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[474] *The Guardian*, 8 December 1995.
[475] Broadcasting Bill 1995, House of Lords, Bill 19, London HMSO.
[476] ibid.
[477] CRCA Seminar on DAB, 15 May 1996.

Stoller (2012, p161) implies the commercial sector may have played a clever game here and embraced DAB as a means to further its own objectives to secure its place in the radio market:

> As was to be the case throughout the creation of digital radio policy and
> legislation, the commercial radio industry was chiefly concerned with
> how far appearing willing to adopt the new transmission technology would
> be a useful bargaining chip as they pressed for de-regulation for their
> analogue services.

This suggests that the commercial sector was not wholly committed to DAB but instead saw that signing up for the new technology, by agreeing to government incentives, was in reality merely a means to attempt to assert further dominance in the analogue arena. If this was indeed smoke and mirrors then Stoller (ibid, p156) goes on to lament the strategy as he feels it:

> forced the entire industry to become apparent supporters of DAB
> when some public commercial scepticism would have been useful.

The commercial sector had of course been cautious as without the promise of raising advertising revenues it was dangerous territory and the initial start-up costs were substantial, involving investment in key areas such as transmitter technology, programming and marketing. By 1998 transmission costs alone for any potential national multiplex were estimated to be in the region of £35 million.[478]

It is fair to say the 1996 Broadcasting Act made it clear commercial radio was to have an important role to play in the consolidation of DAB in the UK. As Lax et al (2008) point out, there were a number of key areas which would give the commercial sector greater prominence:

> The awarding of the multiplex operating licences to the existing big
> commercial radio groups represented a major shift from the BBC in favour
> of the commercial sector, particularly at national level where there would

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[478] Report on UK Commercial Radio's Future, National Economic Research Associates, London, 1998.

now be as many commercial stations as public service stations. The control
of the multiplexes by the large radio groups, coupled with a relaxed regulatory
regime would help give these groups competitive advantage. The inclusion
of an automatic renewal of existing analogue licences helped persuade
commercial stations to risk investment in DAB. Also, the regulator, the
Radio Authority, was to take a lighter touch… decisions on which stations
should be carried on a particular multiplex were left to the multiplex
operators and these decisions were made on a commercial basis.

While the commercial sector had itself been making huge steps in terms of poaching
audience from the BBC, the new technology coupled with new legislation now gave it
extra powers to encroach further on the BBC's hegemonic status.

The first advertisement of a local digital multiplex was for the Birmingham area on 20
November 1998,[479] followed closely by Manchester and the first of three multiplexes
for Greater London. After this, the Radio Academy would advertise one multiplex a
month over the next two years thus offering every established ILR the opportunity to
renew its analogue licence by simply agreeing to make itself available for DAB and
obviating the need to enter into any form of competition in order to have its analogue
licence extended. Stoller (2010, p284) points out that very few multiplex places did
indeed end up being competed for, except for those in London with just one consortium
usually applying, led by the existing ILR. But this changed in the second phase of
advertisements for wider coverage licences where some rivalries loomed between
heritage ILRs and new regional companies, suggesting that competition within the
commercial sector itself was now going to lend a new dynamic as the sector attempted
to introduce DAB. Nevertheless, the award of local multiplexes continued apace with 8
awarded in 1999, 12 in 2000, 13 in 2001 and 6 in 2002[480] with most new licence holders
continuing the emergent trend of being owned by the big radio groups which had sprung
up as a result of the 1996 Broadcasting Act.[481]

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[479] Radio Authority press release, 120/98, 18 November 1998.
[480] Directory of Local Radio Multiplexes http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/archive/rau/radio-stations/digital/dm-main.html
[481] Examples include Capital, Emap, Scottish Radio Holdings and GWR. Not to be confused
with multiplex operators who ran the actual multiplexes and similarly required a licence to do
so.

As regards local DAB services, the promise of locally inspired content did not endure and from one part of the country to another many of these local services sounded broadly similar and this was more acute for stations which shared the same ownership. Stoller (2010, p285) identifies further factors which ultimately led to the early failure of local DAB stations including competition from other commercial, as well as BBC digital services, the continued slow take up of DAB among consumers, high rentals charged by the multiplex owners and a continued degree of lethargy on a general level among some commercial players. Stoller (ibid) concludes that perhaps 'commercial DAB attempted too much, too soon'.

If Stoller claims that a phlegmatic approach to DAB may still have characterised some commercial operators well into the latter part of the 1990s, then it is possible to identify a more enthusiastic manner when considering the first national multiplex. The national commercial digital multiplex was advertised on 21 March 1998. There was only one application and it came from Digital One, a company, perhaps unsurprisingly heavily dominated by GWR and which reflected what had become a passion for digital radio from GWR stalwarts Ralph Bernard[482] and Quentin Howard[483] who had built a reputation among those within the commercial sector as passionate advocates of DAB.[484] Howard in particular became recognised within the industry as a 'digital evangelist'[485] who was convinced of the future of digital radio:

> All media is going digital… to think that analogue will still be able
> to hold its own in ten years time is unrealistic, it won't be able to
> compete.[486]

Bernard and Howard, and Howard in particular, became figureheads for DAB (Jones, interview with author, 2014), and were driven as much by the base economic needs of the companies as by the sound quality and extended services arguments and often in presentations to commercial partners, Howard was known to employ a familiar analogy of owning a piece of land, arguing it was always better to own it no matter how it was

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[482] Chairman, GWR.
[483] Chief Engineer, GWR.
[484] RadioCentre Roll of Honour revealed. *Radio Today*, 3 July 2013.
[485] Commonwealth Broadcaster's Handbook and Directory 2006, p31. London, Commonwealth Broadcasting Association.
[486] Quentin Howard: The Changing Face of Radio. *Director Magazine*, March 1999.

used (Jones ibid). By the late 1990s Howard was entirely convinced DAB was essential for the commercial sector and his language is very much couched in terms of radio not being left behind and needing to partake of the digital contagion that was pervading all media forms (Jones ibid). Howard identifies 1997 as the year when his own company GWR, finally bought into DAB and believes it was his company which spearheaded the commercial sector's assault around this time. As he points out, other big companies, such as Capital in London had told him they were content with their FM signal and the existing BBC London trial had not appeared to offer any viable threat (Howard, interview with author, 2004) but according to Howard:

> They were missing the point, it was about more choice, it was about
> more channels for your portfolio but what they really misunderstood
> was that it was about territory, it was about achieving more ground and
> that was important, particularly gaining ground on the BBC (Howard ibid).

Howard and his small number of cohorts first became curious when the BBC began its London Experiment in 1995 and he claims they would simply jump on a London bus and travel around listening to how it sounded on equipment which was still quite cumbersome (Howard ibid), but this was enough to persuade GWR to attempt a similar experiment in 1996, trialling Classic FM in the London area. Howard (ibid) recounts this was a joint experiment with British Telecom (BT) with the multiplex set up in the BT tower and it ran until 1998. Not only did the transmissions include audio and data services but also included a video stream, revealing the continued uncertainty surrounding what purpose DAB might ultimately serve.

It was not surprising therefore that GWR would be interested in bidding for the first national commercial multiplex once it was advertised by the Radio Authority on 24 March 1998. Bidders were expected to pay a cash sum for the licence[487] and be judged on criteria which included 'commitments to promoting the take up of digital radio and the introduction of innovative services' (Lax 2009, p134). In the event, there was only one bid from Digital One, a consortium consisting of GWR and NTL. The three national analogue commercial services (Classic FM, Talk Radio and Virgin Radio) had to be included as part of the offering and a further seven digital only services took up the remaining spaces - of these only *Planet Rock* has survived to remain on air to this

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[487] £10,000 per annum (Goddard 2010, p28).

day. By the beginning of 1999 the Digital One multiplex was covering 60% of the UK population (Howard, interview with author, 2004).

There was some concern within the Radio Authority that Digital One, as the sole bidder, would come to dominate the commercial sector's DAB direction and become highly selective on the programme services to be carried on the multiplex but Stoller (2010, p282) claims its representation managed to allay those fears and was thus awarded the licence. Digital One launched on 15 November 1999 and this was considered a very laudable achievement in the circumstances and as Stoller (ibid) concludes it was:

> A mark of Digital One's enthusiasm that the company built a new
> network and got the programmes on air despite the falling away of
> the other INR operators and a pretty lukewarm radio industry.

Howard at this point became Chief Executive of Digital One and it is useful to consider his and the company's role in driving digital at this point. Howard (interview with author, 2004) admits as soon as Digital One was awarded the licence in October 1998, he set out on a mission to:

> Build a business model for commercial radio, sell capacity on the
> multiplex, create a raft of stations that would appeal to consumers
> and fundamentally create a marketing proposition.

It would appear Digital One wished to employ commercial principles in constructing its own model for DAB which would exploit DAB's technical advantages in order to take advantage of the market opportunities it presented. Howard (ibid) is adamant that securing a primary market position for the commercial sector was of great importance but admits that in attempting to achieve this he decided to approach the BBC:

> One of the first things I did was to go and knock on the BBC's door
> and say, look, we should do this together… as the commercial
> company we have got the freedom do try things that you can't and if
> we pool together maybe we can both help make DAB work.

Although a relationship of sorts had existed between the BBC and the commercial sector in regard to DAB, Howard's statement suggests that it was Digital One who took the first step in promoting that relationship to a different level and most importantly, narrowing the number of participants from the BBC and disparate entities such as the Radio Authority and a myriad of companies, to solely the BBC and Digital One, two entities who shared similar positions in the digital domain. Howard (ibid) claims this worked because as he told the BBC:

> You have got the muscle, you have got the name, we are the upstarts
> but that means we can take the risks and see what can work and
> therefore together we should be able to build DAB successfully for
> the UK.

Digital One's approach to the BBC culminated in the first manifestation of formalised collaboration in the form of a co-operation agreement which was drawn up between both parties and which laid down parameters for the pooling of resources and research (Howard, interview with author, 2004; Jones, interview with author, 2104).[488] Howard claims it was this which would lead to the ultimate formation of the Digital Radio Development Bureau (DRDB)[489] in 2000, which became an incarnation of how the relationship would operate and one which Starkey (2008) believes:

> Provided the clear focus and coordinated strategy necessary
> for DAB to gain such a strong foothold in the UK market.

The timing of Howard's approach was fortuitous as it coincided with the appointment of Jenny Abramsky as the new BBC Director of Radio in January 1999 who was about to embark on a process of proselytism of DAB within the BBC itself (Nelson, interview with author, 2003) and therefore for the BBC, a degree of support from the commercial side may have been deemed providential.

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[488] Also cited in the BBC's submission to the DCMS Review of DAB, October 2004.

[489] The Digital Radio Development Bureau (DRDB) was the radio industry trade body for DAB digital radio. Established in April 2000, it was funded and supported by the BBC, Digital One and other multiplex operators and the CRCA, its task was to ensure DAB digital radio's wide accessibility and swift adoption in the UK alongside a consistent and effective marketing. It was incorporated into the newly formed Digital Radio UK in 2009.

Despite a scenario of BBC and commercial sector commitment to DAB, the failing of the new technology was no more evident than in the poor performance of sales of receivers. By the end of 1998 it was estimated that fewer than 3,000 receivers had been sold which was in stark comparison to the estimated 100 million analogue receivers across the UK by the end of the 1990s (Lax 2009, p134). By 1997, both the BBC and the commercial sector had been pinning their hopes on the main European equipment fair, the Internationale Funkausstellung (IFA) in Berlin, taking place in August of that year. As Cornell (interview with author, 2003) has described, the BBC felt let down by the 1995 IFA which failed miserably to exhibit the necessary new equipment upon which the BBC had been depending. The 1997 show was no different, it transpired there were few sets on display yet again with only a handful of manufacturers presenting prototypes (Hoeg and Lauterbach 2009, p240), these were all in-car models and possessed the same design flaws which had constantly inhibited DAB, namely the relative gargantuan size, the exorbitant retail price and the power hungry nature. Cornell (interview with author, 2003) recalls the disappointment at the BBC where plans had been made to deliver BBC DAB services into the exhibition hall only to find there was no opportunity to hear them:

> We had put in a lot of effort, we had wanted to make a big
> splash in 1997 after the disappointment of 1995 but our efforts
> were not rewarded in any way by the manufacturers.

The commercial sector, which had been a mere onlooker in 1995 also felt disappointed by the lack of worthy equipment on display in 1997 and there was a feeling beginning to emerge that without some impetus from the private sector at this juncture the poor response of radio set manufacturers could 'slow DAB down almost to a stop' (Stoller 2010, p284). By the time of the next IFA in 1999, there were a few more sets on display (Hoeg and Lauterbach ibid) but not enough to persuade senior figures within the BBC, who had been reticent anyway, that DAB was definitely going to happen (Nelson, interview with author, 2003). The ground was now set for the driving force of DAB in the UK to switch completely from the BBC to the commercial sector.

Howard (interview with author, 2004) argues there was a realisation within the commercial sector, and particularly among the new wave of DAB proponents, of which he was a leading figure, that there was now a real danger of DAB not happening and

that someone needed to intervene in the market for receiving sets as this was where the ultimate solution could be found. As Director of Engineering at GWR, Howard says he and his team identified that the main technical problem with the first generation of DAB sets was the silicon chip (Hoeg and Lauterbach 2009, p284) which was extremely expensive thus forcing up the final retail price. GWR set about trying to develop a second generation chip which would be cheap enough to bring down the price substantially and also aid in altering the size. Early on in this project the primary aim was to create a DAB receiving set which would retail for less than £100 as this was considered to be the point where consumers might begin to find DAB attractive and GWR consequently embarked on a mission to partly finance research among manufacturers to develop a chip that would bring this about (Howard, interview with author, 2004).

The first portable DAB radio set for under £100 eventually became available in the UK in 2002 and was 'a direct result of GWR's financial input' (Rudin 2006). The Pure Evoke 1 was introduced by Videologic in July,[490] retailing at £99, thus breaking the £100 barrier. Manufacturers also felt they had crossed the DAB rubicon with Pure confident that:

> At this price point the superb sound quality and content of DAB
> digital radio is finally accessible to the mainstream of UK consumers…
> the pent up demand for low cost, high performance DAB products
> can now be satisfied with a sustainable sub-£100 product.[491]

The commercial radio sector expressed its own joy at the arrival of the new £99 DAB receiver declaring that it marked the beginning of:

> exciting times for DAB digital radio. The Pure Evoke 1 is the first
> in a series of new, affordable DAB products that we expect to
> significantly push forward the DAB market during the second half
> of 2002.[492]

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[490] Videologic is a British semi-conductor R&D and licensing company which became a division of Imagination Technologies in 1999 http://www.imgtec.com/. Pure is a British consumer electronics manufacturer http://www.pure.com/about/ and is a division of Imagination Technologies.

[491] Pure press release, 1 July 2002.

It is true more companies did join the DAB market in Britain although Pure was to become the brand that was synonymous with DAB radio alongside Roberts, a British company which had been making radio sets since 1932 and had been a leading manufacturer during the emergent transistor era of the 1960s (Geddes and Bussey 1987). With the Pure Evoke 1 managing to stimulate the market and other manufacturers now joining the scramble to provide sets, one would guess that sales might begin to reflect this new found market confidence, alas the most lucrative period in the following months came over Christmas 2003 when 176,000 sets were sold[493] a disappointing figure when compared to the initial investment costs. By July 2004, almost two years after the launch of the Pure Evoke 1, almost two years after the launch of the new BBC national services and five years after the launch of the national commercial multiplex, 682,000 sets had been sold and this was expected to reach the 1 million mark by the end of the year[494] which was significant for the radio companies but not so much for the manufacturers who in an attempt to boost sales began to divert production from single platform sets (offering DAB only) to dual platform sets (offering both DAB and FM), this would provide a safety net should DAB fail to develop as a platform on its own (Goddard 2010, p46).

On the whole, 2002 was in general terms a good year for DAB, it saw the launch of the first sub-£100 set and the introduction of new BBC services - thus we see content perfectly complementing technology and vice versa. Although sales of sets may not have been as high as expected, it still represented an increasing take-up of the technology among consumers and in this the role of the chip was paramount, as Pure pointed out:

> The latest 3rd generation DAB technology, Frontier Silicon's Chorus
> FS1010 is a single-chip DAB/Audio processor and enables Videologic
> to create a lower cost DAB radio with more advanced features than first
> and second generation DAB products.[495]

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[492] Ian Dickens, Chief Executive, DRDB. DRDB press release 1 July 2002.
[493] Gfk research on behalf of DRDB, December 2003.
[494] Digital Radio Take-up to Break 1m Mark by End of 2004. *Campaign*, 29 September 2004
[495] ibid.

GWR's decision to sign a deal with Imagination Technologies in March 2001 to invest an estimated £3 million towards making the chip (Howard, interview with author, 2004) was risky but also proved propitious and Howard believes if they had not done so at that particular time then DAB may never have taken off. Stoller (2010, p288) in his work on DAB and the commercial sector overlooks GWR's specific investment in the manufacturing side but instead highlights how the DRDB also provided seed-corn funding towards the development of a third generation chip which he says eventually 'lifted the market from virtual stagnation to modest niche availability'. In terms of DAB landmarks, Howard (interview with author, 2004) concedes the creation of the new BBC services in 2002 was certainly one but the development of the chip that launched the £99 set in the same year was certainly another:

> I am absolutely convinced, if we had not got the chip we would be
> looking at a market which would never have exceeded a maximum
> of 200,000 DAB sets and a price that could never have fallen any
> lower than £199 per set.

As for Imagination Technologies, who developed the chip, the investment also proved opportune in the long run as ten years later its chip would not only power Pure radios, but also 70% of the DAB receiving set market.[496]

Conclusion

By the early years of the millennium, DAB still had not become a fulsome success story but it was succeeding. Again quoting Stoller (2010, p288) we can say for certain that the market for DAB had gone from nothing to at least a 'modest niche availability'. At a meeting of the Radio Academy in 2003,[497] focussing on DAB, it was evident that even among the 'radio people' in attendance there was a feeling that despite the significant progress that had been made over the past few years in terms of sets and multiplexes, DAB was still not achieving the results that had been hoped for. The session chairman, Roger Bolton, asked those assembled how many had a DAB radio to which only about

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[496] Pure: Britain's 10 Year Old Radio Star. *Daily Telegraph*, 2 May 2012.
[497] Radio Academy monthly meeting, May 2003. Off Air (Radio Academy newsletter, Autumn 2003).

60% had purchased one: if this was the ratio within the industry then it would appear that DAB was still a fledgling medium. Some contributors at the meeting were concerned about this. Ron Coles from Saga[498] was adamant more sets needed to be sold if companies like his were to survive while Andrea Kilbourne from Emap[499] claimed that digital television platforms and particularly Freeview,[500] which launched in September 2002, had helped more in promoting their digital radio brands than DAB. This was backed up by UBC's[501] Simon Cole who estimated that according to his company's research, 1.5 million people were now listening to services that were not available to them terrestrially and that one of the main methods of listening was via digital television, although he did think that this could be encouraging for the sale of DAB sets in the longer run by establishing existing brands.[502] This notion that the saviour of digital radio could be television was one shared by many in the commercial sector who did not possess the same degree of enthusiasm for DAB as extolled by the likes of GWR. Indeed in 2002, some 2.8 million adults were listening to radio via digital satellite or digital cable televisions every week, which equated to around 6% of the adult population.[503] The figures also revealed almost 14% of all UK adults had listened at some point to radio via their television which worked out at around 6.7 million people[504] and these figures were likely to grow as Freeview took off. There was a feeling among some commercial players that DAB was still not going to happen and Stoller (2010, p288) encapsulates that sentiment when he states; 'DAB was not working. What rescued digital radio was digital television.'

While the smaller commercial stations were becoming more hesitant on the grounds that few receivers had been sold (Lax et al 2008), other elements were pointing the finger at the BBC for the initial slow performance of DAB. Some commercial operators took umbrage at the BBC's decision to launch its new services and blamed the corporation for introducing a wedge of unfair competition. Interviewed for a special issue of the

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[498] Saga operated Primetime Radio on the national multiplex as well as local Saga Radio digital services.

[499] EMAP operated seven local DAB multiplexes and owned 40 UK and Ireland local commercial radio stations. Now part of Bauer Radio.

[500] Free-to-air digital terrestrial television service. It is a joint venture between the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Sky and transmitter operator Arqiva (See Given and Norris 2010).

[501] Unique Broadcasting Company, founded in 1989. It bought the Classic Gold Digital Network from GWR Group in 2002. Now known as UBC Media Group.

[502] Radio Academy monthy meeting, May 2003. Off Air (Radio Academy newsletter, Autumn 2003).

[503] RAJAR, Q3, 2002.

[504] ibid.

BBC's Ariel in 2001,[505] Patrick Berry of Choice FM[506] objected to Network X[507] which he feared would undercut the digital version of his own station. Meanwhile Shujat Ali of Manchester's Asian Sound had similar concerns regarding the BBC's intention of making its Asian Network available nationally on DAB which he claimed would 'suffocate' his stations.[508] The BBC rejected these criticisms claiming it had evidence that the commercial industry as a whole was in favour of the BBC's plans for new services on the grounds that they would encourage the take up of digital receivers.[509] This raises the interesting question of whether the BBC and Digital One were on a course of DAB promotion together which left the other commercial operators out on a limb. When asked about this Howard (interview with author, 2004) replied that the compelling argument for Digital One was to match the BBC in terms of a national multiplex as this would create a level field upon which to compete with the BBC, a luxury the commercial sector never had before. It could not therefore very easily challenge the BBC's own multiplex or the genres of stations on it, all it could do was to compete and attempt to continue the commercial sector's recent period of supremacy against its arch enemy.

The commercial sector was still maintaining its healthy status as the new millennium began so one can understand Howard's desire to capitalise on this position. By 1999 local commercial stations were capturing nearly 40% of all radio listening between them and British listeners was more likely to be tuned into a local commercial station than any other service.[510] In 2000 66% of the UK adult population was listening regularly to a commercial radio station[511] and by 2001 77% of all listening to UK local radio was captured by the commercial sector[512] and the sector was proving profitable ground for advertisers with commercial radio revenue from advertising reaching £577 million between June 2000 and June 2001.[513] But it was not without its detractors, with the greatest criticism directed at the fact that most stations offered the same fayre of Top 40 hits (Hendy 2000c, MacFarland 2011, p148). Irvine (2000) believes one of the

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[505] New Television and Radio Get Go-Ahead. *Ariel Digital Special*, 14 September 2001.
[506] A 24 hour black music station covering South London since March 1990.
[507] See Chapter 5.
[508] New Television and Radio Get Go-Ahead. *Ariel Digital Special*, 14 September 2001.
[509] ibid.
[510] RAJAR, Q1 1999.
[511] RAJAR, Q2 2000.
[512] RAJAR, Q2 2001.
[513] Commercial Radio Revenues. Radio Advertising Bureau, 2001.

sector's main critics in this regard was actually its own regulator, the Radio Authority, which in a consultation on a new White Paper in 2000,[514] advised the government to establish a third sector of radio distinct from the BBC and the existing commercial stations. It called this tier 'Access Radio' and promoted it as 'a means to assist in education, social exclusion and experimentation and thus extend the diversity of radio services.'[515] The conclusion from within the commercial sector was that the Radio Authority did not think it was fulfilling its goals (Irvine ibid).

If GWR and then Digital One were keen on pursuing DAB but finding support for this cause within its own industry somewhat nebulous, while at the same time noting that the BBC was seeking a similar end goal, then it would seem inevitable that these two erstwhile enemies might seek to instigate a policy of cooperation in order to achieve the same goal. A policy of cooperation had of course been already implemented under the auspices of the DRDB where the BBC and the CRCA were sharing conference platforms and collaborating on information (Stoller 2010, p288). Not only that but the DRDB launched a series of marketing campaigns across national, regional and local analogue commercial radio stations through 2002 explaining DAB and using the BBC's John Peel[516] as a trusted voice who could reach across the generations (Chignell and Devlin 2006). The BBC meanwhile, launched its own series of promotions for its new services as they launched over 2002 with trails appearing across its analogue radio stations and television channels, again attempting to educate audiences about what DAB could offer. A big step in this educative strategy by the BBC and the commercial sector was the unveiling of a logo and brand identity for DAB in April 2002 which was to be used on all literature and point-of-sale material for DAB digital radios, as well as advertising across all media.[517] While the DRDB was striving to promote DAB for both the BBC and the commercial sector there was a tangible strategy of cooperation continuing separately between the BBC and Digital One, in fact the relationship became very close with visits between Digital One and the BBC's Audio & Music Interactive department becoming commonplace (Nelson, interview with author, 2003; Howard, interview with author, 2004) and geared at promoting knowledge and acceptance of

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[514] White Paper: A New Future for Communications. DTI/DCMS 2000. London, HMSO.
[515] Radio Academy response to White Paper: A New Future for Communications. Radio Academy, February 2001.
[516] John Peel: the New Voice of Commercial DAB Digital Radio. DRDB press release 18 January 2002
http://www.ukdigitalradio.com/news/display.asp?searchnews=&year=2002&id=106
[517] DRDB Reveals Identity for Digital Radio Technology. *Marketing magazine*, 11 April 2002.

DAB among staff.[518] Yet the BBC was perhaps somewhat cautious of the CRCA as it had already lobbied the DCMS to restrict the BBC's new services, fearing the impact they would have on new commercial outlets and citing as an example how BBC 7 might impact on Oneword[519] which was launched by Unique in May 2000 (Stoller 2010, p288). It was evident that The BBC and Digital One had decided to pursue their own micro-strategy of DAB promotion, believing perhaps that they were the technology's true champions.

Stoller calls Section IV of his book; 'Victory of the Commercial Model 1990-2003' and it is an apt title. It was the era when the commercial sector came to the fore, in analogue radio terms it caught up with the BBC, equalled it and then overtook it in 1995 and maintained its position of strength. As far as digital radio is concerned, I suggest an amendment to this title, instead 'Victory of the Commercial Model 1997-2002'. Before 1997 one has to admit that the BBC was the DAB champion, it helped develop the technology and implemented a sustained trial, indeed, those in the commercial sector concede this fact (Howard, interview with author, 2004; Jones, interview with author, 2014). After 2002, when the BBC launched its new digital only services one could argue we had moved back into equilibrium with the BBC gradually in the ascendancy. However in the intervening period there is no doubt the commercial sector was the prime driver of DAB, and a number of factors were key here. Between 1998 and its disbandment in 2003, the Radio Authority had awarded 45 local multiplexes offering more than 270 programme services (Stoller 2010, p286) it also awarded one national multiplex and the advertising of that multiplex was crucial, although there was not a great deal of competition for it, in fact it only had one bidder, Digital One, but what is important is that it provided an opportunity of those within the commercial sector who believed in DAB to pursue it in their own manner. This step ultimately led to another factor, namely that of the chip which Digital One had invested so heavily in and which brought down the price of receivers which had been a major obstacle. A final factor was the diminishing enthusiasm within the BBC which occurred around the same time. The BBC's commitment was foundering due to an insouciance at the highest echelons within the organisation and if the commercial sector had not bolstered a flailing DAB at this point, it is reasonable to question if it might have survived at all. Digital One,

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[518] The author also recalls the numerous meetings extolling DAB and offers of discounted DAB sets available to BBC and commercial sector staff.
[519] A national digital speech network which remained on air until 2008.

having secured the national multiplex in 1998, embarked upon a sustained programme of investment that ten years later had still failed to produce a profit while the manufacturers had already achieved the economies of scale required to produce DAB sets economically (Starkey 2008). But its role in sustaining DAB through the late 1990s should not be overlooked and allows us to conclude that during that crucial period the commercial sector was the DAB champion in the UK (Jones, interview with author, 2014).

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this thesis has been to account for the roles played by the BBC and the commercial radio sector in promoting DAB radio in the UK and show how this altered the existing relationship between both through the fostering of a spirit of cooperation which had little historical precedent. The arrival of DAB represents a useful demarcation point. Before it, I argue that the BBC was the dominant radio player and illustrate - through historical account – how this pervaded until the coincidental arrival of the DAB era, despite significant demarches from the commercial sector. However this does not suggest any notion of failure on the part of the commercial sector but instead I emphasise the crucial role it has played in UK radio history at various stages. The balance of power shifted around about the same time as DAB emerged as a new technology, with a greater degree of equality typifying the structure of the industry. In conclusion, I argue that this similitude provided the perfect launch pad for DAB which in turn instigated a novel spirit of cooperation.

It began in Section 1 with an historical account of the relationship between the two entities and their respective places in the UK radio market. For the BBC, it emerged itself from an initial cooperation among radio manufacturers before becoming a national entity enshrined with a PSB remit as the very nature of broadcasting took shape. Following the arrival of competitors in the 1930s it began a journey of reconciling its role as PSB guardian with the need to adapt to changes in audience demands. The war years allowed the BBC to re-establish its monopoly position before having to yet again counter further competition in the post-war era. In many ways the BBC may be deemed to have been fortunate to have had competition eradicated due to war or legislation (as in the case of the pirates) and it does beg the question of how would the BBC have survived had not these factors intervened at such opportune moments? Legislation also had the effect of creating competition, under the Sound Broadcasting Act 1972 and the Broadcasting Act 1990, so since 1972 the BBC has had to face a commercial sector whose position was strengthened by successive legislation. It is reasonable to conclude that on many occasions, the BBC has had to react to competitors' actions in order to maintain a position within the radio market and one could argue that an ambivalence towards audience focus was not completely overcome until the threat of legalised competition emerged in the 1960s.

Commercial opposition to the BBC has taken a number of forms over the course of Britain's radio history. The first form, which emerged in the 1930s, set the template for

profit-driven broadcasting led by audience-maximising content in order to achieve increased advertising and sponsorship revenue. This model of commercial radio is one which still permeates the commercial sector since the Broadcasting Act 1990 but in the intervening period the shape of commercial radio has had various guises. Its distinguishing feature was often its illegality but its other characteristic was one of initiating change to the very shape of radio broadcasting itself, often spearheading format and presentation changes which were then subsequently pursued by the BBC. One can argue that in the evolution of radio broadcasting, the commercial sector played a crucial role, often simply replicated by the BBC, and that today's radio industry is heavily reliant on those steps made by commercial companies, legitimate or otherwise.

The radio industry up to this point is characterised by traditional notions of competition based on classical, Marxist descriptions of competition between firms which are deemed 'a warlike process' (Moudud 2013, p30);

> Each individual capital strives to capture the largest possible share of
> the market and supplant its competitors and exclude them from the market
> (Marx 1968, p484).

Section 2 of the thesis goes on to give an in-depth study of the roles of the BBC and the commercial sector in the UK's journey into digital radio broadcasting. I contend that the form of competition described above changed for a period due to the arrival of digital technology. With both the BBC and the commercial sector now on a more level playing field, as a result of legislative change, and as digitalisation came to pervade the entire media industry, then both parties accepted a degree of symbiotic cooperation as an essential short-term pre-requisite in order to ensure the successful penetration of a technology which had perceived long term benefits for both parties. Hence for a duration, the classic Marxist interpretation of competition is replaced by what Dimmick (2003) describes as a 'niche theory of competition' whereby the rise of a new medium (or in this case a new technology) competes with established media (or in this case an established technology) for consumer interaction, satisfaction and revenue. The consequences of competition in such an environment include possible displacement or exclusion, hence competition reverts to simple co-existence in order to facilitate a successful transition towards the new technology. If such a co-existence did typify the radio industry during the period of the introduction of DAB then that proposes a number

of questions; firstly, what form did that co-existence take, did it actually work and did it come to an end?

Cooperation

Although Dimmick (ibid) employs the term 'co-existence' to describe collaboration in a competitive arena, I use the term 'co-operation' in this study as it implies a more active form of mutual undertaking and one which requires an active participative role by all parties. A number of important factors characterize the DAB era and which inspired its cooperative dimension. Firstly, the BBC and the commercial sector became equal players within the radio industry after many years of BBC domination and competitors' attempts to redress this imbalance and secondly, technological change meant that a new platform for radio was deemed essential by both the BBC and the commercial sector due largely to the fact that spectrum shortage on the traditional analogue platform[520] meant growth for the industry would be severely constrained. These factors of equality and necessity provided the foundations for cooperation as a means of ensuring the survival of radio as an industry in a time of momentous change.

For the BBC, its decision to pursue DAB was also based on its strong PSB remit. As Hendy (2000b) points out it has been large public service broadcasters with their 'strategic ability to invest in long-term research and without the need to deliver an immediate return of large audiences to advertisers' that have been central to the development of DAB. Indeed the BBC has been able to invest in digital (radio, television and online) through the licence fee[521] and has played a prominent role in building digital Britain[522] which in turn has led to changes to the BBC model with encroaching notions of alternative funding in order to aid its transformation into an 'international multimedia enterprise'[523] and one which was no longer 'commerce

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[520] The Future Management of the Radio Spectrum: A Consultative Document. Radio Communications Agency (an executive agency of the Department of Trade & Industry), March 1994. London, HMSO.
[521] The BBC spent £154 million (7% of licence fee income) on digital services in 1998/99. BBC Annual Report & Accounts 1998/99.
[522] Building Public Value: Renewing the BBC for a Digital World. June 2004. BBC Publications.
[523] White Paper. The Future of the BBC: Serving the Nation, Competing Worldwide, July 1994. (DNH 1994).

averse' particularly under Greg Dyke (Born 2004, p475). Born says Dyke's approach was one of public service orientation 'peppered with pragmatism' (Born ibid, p486).

The commercial sector's 'increased prominence and market presence and desire to build on its success by creating even more stations' (Howard, interview with author, 2004) meant it was ready to embrace a platform that would allow this to happen. The sector knew it was making significant steps in finding appreciation among the radio audience and was, according to some reports, 'beating the BBC on both a national and local level in reflecting listener concerns and lifestyles.'[524] The commercial sector was however hesitant initially due to the weakness of DAB receiving set sales, which is why it invested so much in developing the chip technology that would drive down the price and since then the sector has played a significant role in DAB investment, particularly in programming.[525]

Any degree of active cooperation between the BBC and commercial radio is not apparent in the years preceding DAB, in fact one can argue that relations between both parties were virtually non-existent and the relationship could be described as distant. As the radio market began to change and become in effect a duopoly, then the first manifestation of a co-ordinated approach came with the formation of RAJAR in 1992. A joint industry body was deemed necessary to 'produce a single set of audience data with which everyone could agree' (Starkey 2002) in order to 'allow for greater accountability in this dynamic marketplace' (Robinson 2000). As the changing face of the industry necessitated cooperation regarding audience measurement then so did it provide the impetus for cooperation in order to promote digital technology.

The creation of the DRDB in 2000 was the joint response by the BBC and the commercial radio companies to promote DAB digital radio's adoption in the UK and was 'a genuine effort by both parties to ensure a successful future for both' (Howard, interview with author, 2004). Under the auspices of the DRDB there was toing and froing between Broadcasting House and the offices of the big radio companies with the singular aim of publicizing DAB.[526] It also included joint missions to the USA[527] to

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[524] Media Futures. 1993. The Henley Centre, London.

[525] By 2008 the sector had injected an estimated €200 million into the development of DAB (Radio Magazine, Issue 825, January 2008).

[526] The author attended a number of these sessions.

[527] The Future of Radio: A Mission to the USA. DTI Global Watch Mission. September 2004.

examine the digital market there and to Japan[528] to attempt to persuade manufacturers of the potential of the UK DAB market, although these are examples of actions which included input from the UK government. The DRDB continues to exist in the form of Digital Radio UK although the days of close contact have long passed and the relationship is now much more formalized and centres around broader issues such as drawing up digital radio action plans for technical specifications of receiver sets and promoting further market penetration. But as Starkey (2008) notes the DRDB provided 'clear focus and coordinated strategy which was necessary for DAB to gain a foothold in the UK'. Whether it has been successful or not is another matter.

DAB: A Success?

To answer this question we can examine the latest evidence of DAB's position in the UK radio industry as of 2015 and in doing so it is possible to identify both successes and failings. According to RAJAR figures, by mid 2015, 50% of the population have a DAB set at home meaning the platform now accounts for almost 27% of all listening hours thus representing a significant milestone. In fact DAB is considered the main driver of overall digital listening which reached 29.5 million (55%) with total digital hours hitting 418 million weekly. Performance of other platforms remained stable with the exception of mobile phones which may represent the main continued threat to the DAB model.[529]

As far as the problem of DAB sets was concerned, sales reached the 5 million mark by 2007 and the 10 million mark only two years later[530] and the 20 million mark in 2014.[531] Despite the increase the price of DAB sets compared to analogue sets has remained a stumbling block even for those in the commercial sector. While many celebrated the 10 million mark others lamented the slow uptake, Scott Taunton (Head of Radio, UTV Media) believing the fact that FM radio sales still outnumbered DAB by three to one meant DAB sales were actually 'going into reverse'[532] Consecutive

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[528] Mission to Japanese Radio Manufacturers. Simon Nelson (BBC Audio & Music Interactive) report to staff. March 2004.
[529] RAJAR Q2 2015.
[530] DRDB press release, 30 November 2009.
[531] Digital Radio UK press release, 21 December 2014.
[532] DAB: 10m Sales, But Still to Win us Over. *The Guardian,* 1 December 2009.

quarterly growth in digital's share of listening came to a halt by 2014 with sales down 9.1% on the previous year despite cross-industry marketing campaign although 48.5% of adults claimed to own either an in-car or domestic DAB set.[533] This was a worrying trend since in 2012 sales of analogue sets had also dropped by a significant 18%.[534] Some figures do suggest that DAB may be reaching a point of acceptable penetration and this was considered to be the case when the main headline for the RAJAR results for the last quarter of 2014 exclaimed 'Digital Radio overtakes analogue in homes for the first time'.[535] Digital Radio UK was able to celebrate that in-home listening via digital platforms had grown to 46.2% overtaking analogue (45.6%). It also claimed over half the population (52%) was now listening to radio on a digital platform every week and of this, two thirds of digital listening was estimated to be through a DAB set[536] however the majority of listening still remained on analogue (56.4%), largely due to the number of people listening in-car.

The success of DAB is not however clear twenty years after the BBC launched its first trial. While in previous years there was consecutive quarterly growth in digital radio's share of total listening hours this has stabilized since 2013 which may suggest a market penetration of DAB as other digital platforms become more attractive with still less than half of UK adults owning a DAB set and with sales of DAB sets down by a significant 9.1% over the course of 2013/14.[537] Despite this the BBC was able to claim that its DAB share of listening 'remained healthy' at 28% compared to commercial radio's 21%[538] although the commercial sector claimed that it was simulcasts of existing analogue BBC services which contributed the most to this figure.[539]

The saviours of the DAB platform may however come from bodies other than the BBC and the commercial sector. As far back as 2006 the electronics retailer, Dixons, was able to announce that it was discontinuing the sale of analogue sets in its stores as it could now offer DAB sets for as little as £29.98 and because it now saw the future of radio in the UK as being digital.[540] DAB in-car radio was always seen as a crucial

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[533] OFCOM Digital Radio Report 2014.
[534] OFCOM Digital Radio Report 2012.
[535] RAJAR Q4 2014.
[536] Digital Radio UK press release for RAJAR Q4 2014.
[537] OFCOM Digital Radio Report 2014.
[538] BBC Platform Report, Q2 2014.
[539] OFCOM Digital Radio Report 2014.
[540] Dixons tunes out of analogue radio sales. Dixons press release, 16 August 2006.

platform and by the first quarter of 2015 Digital Radio UK was able to say there were 450,000 new cars registered with digital radio as standard and of the top 20 selling car brands in the UK, five of them now offered digital radio as standard in all models – Audi, BMW, Mini, Land Rover and Jaguar while a further eight had digital radio as standard in the majority of all models – Ford, Vauxhall, VW, Nissan, Mercedes, Toyota, Citroen and Skoda. [541] With an estimated 61% of new cars in 2014 having DAB coupled with the plan to build 182 new digital transmitters by 2016 meant there was reason was for both Digital Radio UK and the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders to hold a conference at Broadcasting House in February 2015 celebrating this important landmark on the digital path.[542]

A major stumbling block for DAB in the UK has been the issue of digital switchover, 'the point at which all national and large local stations currently broadcasting on both DAB and analogue frequencies will cease to broadcast on analogue.'[543] Committed to the notion of switchover, the government launched the Digital Radio Action Plan in July 2010 to ensure that 'if, or when, the market is ready for a switchover it can be delivered in a way so as to protect the needs of listeners, and results in a radio industry fit for a digital age.'[544] This followed on from the government's 2009 Digital Britain report[545] which confirmed DAB as the future direction of digital radio in the UK, the report also stated that switchover would only take place when digital radio listening figures would reach 50% and when coverage of DAB matched that of FM and it was envisaged these conditions would be met by 2015. The Digital Economy Act 2010 enshrined the need for the UK to prepare for switchover but despite striving to attain this goal, switchover has proven to be difficult to achieve simply because satisfying the two pre-conditions has proven elusive. As the 2015 deadline has now passed the future of switchover still remains unclear with the most recent government pronouncement heralding the fact that many cars now have DAB fitted as standard, sets have become affordable, and they are much more energy efficient. What is lacking though is a clear timetable for switchover with the government now only able to claim it is 'close to its target of getting listeners to switch to digital' without committing to a definitive

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[541] *Radio Today*, 12 April 2015.
[542] Drive to Digital Conference, 6 February 2015.
[543] Digital Radio Action Plan, 14 February 2013, DCMS.
[544] Digital Radio Action Plan, 8 July 2010, DCMS.
[545] Digital Britain Report, 16 June 2009, DCMS.

deadline.[546] Digital radio's relative slow adoption rate compared to digital television and the subsequent inability to adhere to a date for switchover for radio highlights the inherent weaknesses within the campaign to promote DAB including a lack of awareness of the medium and scepticism regarding the complete migration of all radio to digital. Lax (2011) perceives the over optimistic targets as being the result of a digital radio policy that is 'responding rather more to the needs and desires of the industry… than in response to the needs of listeners or to any public consultation or deliberation.'

The Journey Continues

As well as the government commitment towards DAB the BBC likewise remains committed as it has done from the very beginning. Having been involved in developing and then rolling out DAB the BBC went on to provide much of its infrastructure. This infrastructure took a number of forms. The technical infrastructure involved investment in transmitter coverage which continues, so that in March 2015 the BBC announced it was launching a further 20 national DAB transmitters increasing coverage from 93% to 97% of the UK by the end of 2015.[547] Programming infrastructure reached its pinnacle with the launch of new services in 2002 although commitment to this faltered when a BBC review of Radio 2 and 6 Music recommended the closure of the latter. This was eventually reversed by the BBC Trust following a campaign by listeners.[548] Marketing infrastructure has continued with campaigns for DAB, largely done as part of Digital Radio UK with the last high profile campaign taking place in the run up to Christmas 2010 although on-air promotion on BBC Radio continues on a daily basis.

The BBC still envisages its role very much as leading the drive to digital radio as illustrated by a document produced by BBC Audio & Music in 2010 which was called 'Leading into Digital'[549] which emphasized the BBC's role in promoting digital radio, however in defining digital radio the document describes it as 'audio content and features not provided by FM or AM' which in itself would suggest DAB may have

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[546] Culture Minister Ed Vaizey, interview on BBC Radio 4 Today programme, 12 August 2015.
[547] BBC press release, 10 March 2015.
[548] Service Review: BBC Radio 2 & BBC 6 Music. BBC Trust, February 2010.
[549] Leading into Digital: What does it mean for BBC Audio & Music? BBC Audio & Music, November 2010.

become only one element of a wider definition of digital radio. Similarly the BBC Radio division's objectives for 2014 centre around making world-class content, transforming offerings to younger audiences, developing a more personal BBC and demonstrating value for money but do not reference DAB at all,[550] although it does feature in the overall corporate objectives with the intention of working to cooperate with government and industry to develop a roadmap for DAB switchover.[551]

For the commercial sector the road to DAB has been more rocky after what one could describe as its apogee around the turn of the millennium. The commercial sector has begun to demonstrate more caution than the BBC so in 2013 a group of 13 companies called on the government to abandon plans for switchover claiming the move would jeopardise local radio.[552] A problem for the commercial sector has been maintaining a coherent approach to DAB. One can argue that an initial enthusiasm within the sector has fragmented and nowhere has this been more evident than in the decision by a number of stations to abandon their place on the DAB multiplexes for purely economic reasons. The most striking example of this came in February 2008 when GCap Media[553] Chief Executive, Fru Hazlitt, announced her intention to close national DAB stations *Planet Rock* and *The Jazz* and sell off the company's stake in the national DAB multiplex claiming that 'DAB with its current cost structure and slow consumer response is not an economically viable platform for the group.'[554] This was a surprising change of strategy for one of the leading commercial players and particularly as it has was the successor of GWR which had played such an important role in promoting DAB only a few years previously.[555]

Another huge setback within the commercial sector came in October 2008 when Channel 4 announced its decision to withdraw from 4 Digital Group, the consortium which was awarded a licence for the second national commercial DAB radio multiplex in 2007. Channel 4 Chief Executive, Andy Duncan, claimed that his company's DAB ambitions had been hit by a slump in advertising revenue and the need to make savings,

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[550] BBC Radio departmental objectives 2014. BBC Annual Report 2013/14.

[551] BBC Corporate Objectives 2014. BBC Annual Report 2013/14.

[552] Abandon digital radio switchover plans, stations tell ministers. *The Guardian*, 11 November 2013.

[553] Formed from the merger of the Capital Radio Group and GWR Group in 2005. and subsequently taken over by Global Media in 2008.

[554] *The Guardian*, 11 February 2008.

[555] GCap Media was subsequently taken over by Global Media in 2008 who reversed the strategy.

he also blamed a lack of enthusiasm among other members of the consortium. Despite proclaiming DAB was the strongest future platform for digital radio he was clear in ruling out any future Channel 4 foray into digital radio.[556] This decision was a significant low point in DAB history in the UK as it represented a stage where the future of DAB as a medium supported by all sections of the radio industry became uncertain after a period of consolidation. It may also represent the point where all out competition replaced cooperation between the BBC and the commercial sector as Channel 4's decision did not provoke any visible distress within the BBC which had been concerned about the former's aim of competing directly with stations such BBC Radio 4. However, OFCOM reacted by stating it 'recognises that the economic environment is very challenging and that all organisations need to make decisions in light of the circumstances they face.'[557] It would be another seven years before a second national DAB multiplex would be awarded.[558]

This future of DAB remains couched in uncertainty and only future historians will be in a position to recount the story of its ultimate success or failure. This study however will be of value as it describes the early period of DAB in the UK. It reveals the reasoning behind the decision by the various parties in the UK radio industry to embrace DAB, it highlights the crucial roles played by the BBC and the commercial sector in pursuing a DAB strategy at both the singular and conjoined levels, and it reveals how this period marked an altering of the established structures within the industry. It would be unwise at this stage to attempt to answer any questions regarding the long-term future of DAB but this study helps us understand its origins and accounts for the status of the industry during this period thus providing an essential historical appraisal which will be of value to those pursuing later research in this field.

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The story of DAB in the UK represents an important chapter in the history of the medium as a whole and one which highlights the changing face of the industry which supports that medium. I have shown during the course of this thesis how DAB came to

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[556] *The Guardian*, 21 October 2008.
[557] OFCOM press release, 10 October 2008.
[558] Sound Digital was awarded the second national DAB multiplex on 27 March 2015.

be seen as an industry wide imperative and how both the BBC and the commercial sector each played crucial separate roles in driving that imperative. It is the conjoined role however which represents the crux of this work as it represents such a significant shift in policy for both parties. A thrusting policy of cooperation regarding DAB helped launch the technology and this is something which could not have been achieved by either party on their own. Whether a long term success or not, the DAB experience draws attention to a fascinating period in radio history. By exploring this period in greater depth I hope to have exposed its historical context, its effect and its significance at a time when the entire radio industry dynamic changed for a particular role and for a particular period.

This study makes an important contribution to the field of media history. It represents more than a historical narrative but instead highlights an important period in the history of radio. I suggest a number of factors characterise the period under scrutiny. A new digital mode of radio listening emerged, and it was one which maintained a strong association with the traditional model of radio listening when compared with other digital platforms which arrived at the same time. The DAB platform became embraced by the BBC and the commercial sector as it was envisaged as a necessity in order to ensure the future survival of the industry. The industry itself had changed and this period represents a time when a change in the balance of power became consolidated - in other words the commercial sector had finally caught up with the BBC. I have sought to reveal how the arrival of the new technology coupled with this change in the balance of power both forced a huge variation in the established relationships within the industry. As well as technological change, the period is one of significant change in the consumption of radio and in the provision of radio, in the structure of the radio industry and ultimately in the very nature of radio itself. The timeline of radio history has a number of key dates and I believe this period should represent such a milestone. During the course of this research I hope to have proven how the DAB era is an important landmark and that the nature of the radio industry had changed for ever.

At an industry level this study clearly illustrates that cooperation has been possible within the radio industry and indeed some other steps have been made since in order to benefit all parties such as the collaborative project to launch Radioplayer.[559] At an

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[559] An online application delivering all UK radio stations on a single portal, launched in December 2010.

academic level, the study emphasises cooperation as a factor which has been missing from previous treatments of the relationship between the BBC and the commercial sector. Rather than assessing the UK radio industry in traditional terms i.e. the function and form of either the BBC or the commercial sector it instead describes an emergent symbiotic aspect thus exposing a significant paradigm shift in our understanding of this relationship and in doing so causes us to reflect upon radio's continued resilience.

GLOSSARY

AFN: American Forces Network

AM: Amplitude Modulation

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation

BSB: British Satellite Broadcasting

BT: British Telecom

BTDC: Baird Television Development Company

CBC: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

CHR: Contemporary Hit Radio

CMA: Community Media Association

CRA: Community Radio Association

DAB: Digital Audio Broadcasting

DCMS: Department for Culture, Media & Sport

DMB: Digital Multimedia Broadcasting

DRM: Digital Radio Mondiale

DTV: Digital Television

DVB: Digital Video Broadcasting

EBU: European Broadcasting Union

FCC: Federal Communications Commission

FM: Frequency Modulation

IBA: Independent Broadcasting Authority

IBC: International Broadcasting Company

IBU: International Broadcasting Union

IFA: Internationale Funkausstellung, Berlin

ILR: Independent Local Radio

INR: Independent National Radio

ISDB: Integrated Services Digital Broadcasting

ITV: Independent Television

LRWP: Local Radio Working Party

LW: Long Wave

MW: Medium Wave

OFCOM: Office of Communications

PSB: Public Service Broadcasting

RA: Radio Authority

RDF: Radiodiffusion Française

RDS: Radio Data System

RSL: Restricted Service Licence

SW: Short Wave

VHF: Very High Frequency

APPENDIX 1

The Future of ILR

Resolutions passed at the Heathrow Conference
Approved unanimously by a special conference of AIRC member companies at Heathrow on Saturday, 23rd June, 1984.

1. AIRC is concerned that UK radio developments now being contemplated are examined in the context of all independent radio, and requires the Government, and the Independent Broadcasting Authority, to take full account of the possible effects of any changes or additions to independent radio on the existing ILR system.

2. AIRC requires that any funds drawn from Independent Local Radio by the Independent Broadcasting Authority must not be used for the provision of transmitters, or to meet any other costs, associated with the development of Independent National Radio.

3. AIRC resolves to commission E.I.U (Economist Intelligence Unit) Informatics, as a matter of urgency, to carry out in-depth research into the various levels and consequences of de-regulation.

4. AIRC totally supports the most recent letter from the Chairman of the Independent Broadcasting Authority to the Home Secretary on pirate radio. AIRC resolves that, in the event Government does not take such actions, the members of AIRC will re-consider their own various statutory and royalty payments, currently costing the industry in excess of £13 million a year.

5. Recognising the nature of the market place, independent radio companies in the UK should be able to trade with the same degree of freedom as other commercial enterprises, limited only by the explicit requirements of the Broadcasting Act, the Companies Acts and the laws of the land applicable to all businesses and private individuals.

6. AIRC calls upon the Independent Broadcasting Authority to acknowledge the essential differences between radio and television marketing opportunities, and relax the advertising control system which at present prevents ILR companies from seizing specific advertising and sponsorship opportunities.

(Memo sent to all AIRC members , 25 June 1984)

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