



Information Rights

bbc.co.uk/foi bbc.co.uk/privacy

Phoebe Morton

15 November 2021

Dear Phoebe Morton,

Freedom of Information request – RFI20211640

Thank you for your request to the BBC of 02 November 2021 seeking the following information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ('the Act'):

"Please can you provide me with viewing figures for the following series of Doctor Who (series starting 2005)

1. Series 1 (March 26 to June 18 2005)
2. "The Christmas Invasion", December 25 2005.
3. Series 2 (April 15 to July 8 2006)
4. "The Runaway Bride", December 25 2006.
5. Series 3 (March 31 to June 30 2007)
6. "Voyage of the Damned", December 25 2007.
7. Series 4 (April 5 to July 5 2008)
8. Specials (2008 to 2010) - titled "The Next Doctor", December 25 2008. "Planet of the Dead", April 11 2009. "The Waters of Mars", November 15 2009. "The End of Time - Part One", December 25 2009. "The End of Time - Part Two", January 1 2010.
9. Series 5 (April 3 to June 26 2010)
10. "A Christmas Carol", December 25 2010.
11. Series 6 (April 23 to October 1 2011)
12. "The Doctor, the Widow and the Wardrobe", December 25 2011.
13. Series 7 (September 1 2012 to May 18 2013)
14. 2013 Specials - titled "The Day of the Doctor", November 23, 2013. "The Time of the Doctor", December 25 2013.
15. Series 8 (August 23 to November 8 2014)
16. "Last Christmas", December 25 2014.
17. Series 9 (September 19 to December 5 2015)
18. "The Return of Doctor Mysterio", December 25 2016.
19. Series 10 (April 15 to July 1 2017)
20. Series 11 (October 7 to December 9 2018)
21. Series 12 (January 1 to March 1 2020)"

The audience figures you have requested is excluded from the Act because if held it would be held for the purposes of 'journalism, art or literature.' The BBC is therefore not obliged to provide this information to you and will not be doing so on this occasion. Part VI of Schedule 1 to FOIA provides that information held by the BBC and the other public service broadcasters is only covered by the Act if it is held for 'purposes *other* than those of journalism, art or literature". The BBC is not required to supply information held for the purposes of creating the BBC's output or information that supports and is closely associated with these creative activities¹.

The limited application of the Act to public service broadcasters was to protect freedom of expression and the rights of the media under Article 10 European Convention on Human Rights ("ECHR"). The BBC, as a media organisation, is under a duty to impart information and ideas on all matters of public interest and the importance of this function has been recognised by the European Court of Human Rights. Maintaining our editorial independence is a crucial factor in enabling the media to fulfil this function. However, the BBC makes a huge range of information available about our programmes and content on bbc.co.uk.

Television viewing figures are provided to the BBC by the Broadcasters' Audience Research Board (BARB). Some summary figures are available free of charge, via the BARB website, www.barb.co.uk, but for more detailed information you need to be a subscriber. Our agreement with BARB stipulates that the data is used for our own internal purposes, should be treated as confidential, and should not be disclosed to any person; to do so would put us in breach of this agreement. In addition, were such information to be disclosed by the BBC (or any other subscriber) free of charge, this would jeopardise the funding model on which BARB operates.

You may be interested to note that the Information Commissioner's Office has considered a similar request about audience figures and in that case agreed with the BBC that this type of information is not covered by the Act.

The Commissioner accepted that audience figures have a role to play in the creative process and may impact upon decisions taken by programme makers and staff responsible for scheduling the BBC's broadcast output. A key part of the BBC's work is obtaining feedback on its services, reflecting on that feedback, and making informed decisions about the quality of the services provided and how to improve those services. Audience figure information is one way that the BBC measures an audience's reaction to a programme and, whether alone or combined with other feedback, this is then used to inform decisions about programme making. This may include decisions about scheduling as well as future programme content. The Commissioner therefore considers that audience figures are held by the BBC for the purposes of journalism, art or literature, and that this type of information is therefore not covered by the Act.

¹ For more information about how the Act applies to the BBC please see the enclosure which follows this letter.

Please note that this guidance is not intended to be a comprehensive legal interpretation of how the Act applies to the BBC.

Appeal Rights

The BBC does not offer an internal review when the information requested is not covered by the Act. If you disagree with our decision you can appeal to the Information Commissioner. Contact details are: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF, tel: 0303 123 1113 or see <http://www.ico.org.uk>

Please note that should the Information Commissioner's Office decide that the Act does cover this information, exemptions under the Act might then apply.

Yours sincerely,

Information Rights
BBC Legal

Freedom of Information

From January 2005 the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000 gives a general right of access to all types of recorded information held by public authorities. The Act also sets out exemptions from that right and places a number of obligations on public authorities. The term “public authority” is defined in the Act; it includes all public bodies and government departments in the UK. The BBC, Channel 4, S4C and MG Alba are the only broadcasting organisations covered by the Act.

Application to the BBC

The BBC has a long tradition of making information available and accessible. It seeks to be open and accountable and already provides the public with a great deal of information about its activities. BBC Audience Services operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week handling telephone and written comments and queries, and the BBC’s website bbc.co.uk provides an extensive online information resource.

It is important to bear this in mind when considering the Freedom of Information Act and how it applies to the BBC. The Act does not apply to the BBC in the way it does to most public authorities in one significant respect. It recognises the different position of the BBC (as well as Channel 4 and S4C) by saying that it covers information “held for purposes other than those of journalism, art or literature”. This means the Act does not apply to information held for the purposes of creating the BBC’s output (TV, radio, online etc), or information that supports and is closely associated with these creative activities.

A great deal of information within this category is currently available from the BBC and will continue to be so. If this is the type of information you are looking for, you can check whether it is available on the BBC’s website bbc.co.uk or contact BBC Audience Services.

The Act does apply to all of the other information we hold about the management and running of the BBC.

The BBC's aim is to enrich people's lives with great programmes and services that inform, educate and entertain. It broadcasts radio and television programmes on analogue and digital services in the UK. It delivers interactive services across the web, television and mobile devices. The BBC's online service is one of Europe's most widely visited content sites. Around the world, international multimedia broadcaster BBC World Service delivers a wide range of language and regional services on radio, TV, online and via wireless handheld devices, together with BBC World News, the commercially-funded international news and information television channel.

The BBC's remit as a public service broadcaster is defined in the BBC Charter and Agreement. It is the responsibility of the Ofcom (the BBC’s independent regulator) to ensure that the organisation delivers against this remit by setting key objectives, approving strategy and policy, and monitoring and assessing performance. Ofcom also safeguard the BBC's independence and ensure the Corporation is accountable to its audiences and to Parliament.