

A FORCE  
FOR GOOD

COMMERCIAL  
RADIO



RADIOCENTRE

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The coronavirus pandemic is by no means over and we are therefore still in uncharted waters. The true extent of the economic impact of an extended lockdown is as yet unclear but it will undoubtedly be severe.

Commercial radio, which is entirely funded by advertising revenue, has not only continued to provide vital public value to its **36 million listeners** but increased its essential news and information.

Radio has a unique and important role to play in times of emergency, uniting the nation. *Commercial Radio: A force for good* highlights some of the important public value that our sector has provided.

July 2020

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## COVID-19 RESPONSE

### COMMERCIAL RADIO OUTPUT

#### News and information

On average, local commercial radio has delivered 25% more and 28% longer news bulletins

Radio is the most trusted medium, according to 77% of listeners

Stations have updated listeners with vital government information throughout the pandemic

#### Public value output

Stations broadcast 10 hours of public value output a week on average

The *Audio Content Fund* green lit 28 new public service projects in its emergency coronavirus round

The Mental Health Minute, now in its third year, broadcast on over 500 stations

Initiatives to support key workers, charities and business, along with outreach to the next generation of talent

### COMMERCIAL RADIO IMPACT

#### Audience

36 million listeners each week, listening for 13 hours

Since lockdown, 85% are listening to the same amount of radio or more

45% of new home workers and 32% of key workers listening more

Commercial radio reaches 62% of BAME audiences (BBC is at 42%)

#### Listener impact

Reasons people tuned in to commercial radio during lockdown

Staying in touch with the outside world – 90%

Keeping me company – 84%

Makes me feel happy – 77%

Delivers trusted news – 64%



Radio stations are acutely aware of the responsibility they have to their listeners to keep them up to date with accurate news and information. This is true at any time, but is especially important during a national emergency.

As the current crisis progresses and more people spend time at home we should also remember that radio is about entertainment, companionship and lightening the mood.

Despite the recent challenges, commercial radio has continued to deliver significant value for audiences, not only in terms of even stronger news and information output, but also in broader types of public service content through initiatives on everything from mental health to charitable work, to providing a sense of community and companionship.

The range, quality and consistency of commercial radio output has been notable despite the shifts in production techniques and reduction in formal regulatory obligations. Ultimately, stations have a vested interest in providing the most compelling content for listeners.

**Siobhan Kenny**  
Radiocentre CEO



The commercial radio industry has played an extremely important role throughout the pandemic. The initiatives and case studies in *Commercial Radio: A force for good* highlight how broadcasters have continued to provide listeners with trusted and relevant content when it was most needed.

The Government recognises the contribution of commercial radio during this period and will continue to do all that it can to support stations and their recovery over the coming months and years.

**The Rt Hon John Whittingdale OBE MP**  
Minister for Media & Data



At this time of national emergency the commercial radio industry has demonstrated its significant public value. Steps taken so far by Government and Ofcom to support the industry are welcome but the sector will require further support in order to safeguard a viable British commercial radio industry.

**Andy Carter MP**  
Chair, APPG on Commercial Radio

# COMMERCIAL RADIO OUTPUT



## NEWS AND INFORMATION

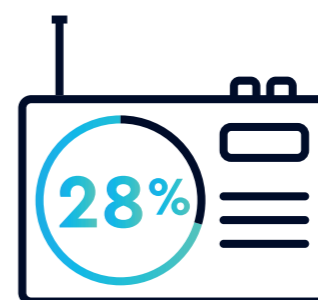
The most significant public value provided by our sector is the regular news updates that broadcast trusted bulletins to a weekly audience of 36 million listeners.

### MORE NEWS, MORE OFTEN

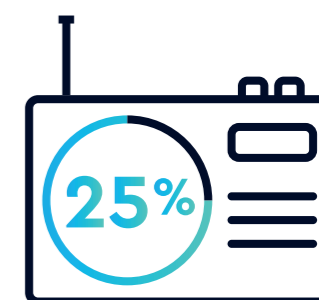
We have surveyed a broad range of UK commercial radio stations and they have confirmed that since the Covid-19 lockdown began in March 2020, their commitment to news coverage has increased. News bulletins have increased both in frequency and duration across the industry.

By providing more news, more often commercial radio is providing significant value for audiences. This has meant additional news coverage and bulletins 24 hours a day every day, as well as special coverage of Government daily news briefings and breaking news flashes.

***On average, local commercial radio has delivered***



***longer bulletins***



***more bulletins***

## TRUSTED NEWS

Radio is consistently found to be among the most trusted sources of news and information. Research commissioned by Radiocentre found that 77% of audiences trust radio, more than any other media.

This is consistent with similar studies by Ofcom and research from the European Commission, which has found radio to be the most trusted medium in Europe for over a decade.

### Radio is the most trusted medium

#### Radio

77%

#### TV

74%

#### Print Newspapers

48%

#### Newspaper website/apps

45%

#### Social Media

15%

Throughout the pandemic commercial radio's on-air bulletins have been complemented by online news coverage, video clips and social media posts – bringing an important trusted source of reliable information to an arena littered with fake news.

## RELEVANT NEWS

Whether it's a national, regional or local story, commercial stations deliver what is most valued by listeners – trusted, relevant news.

The range, quality and consistency of commercial radio output has been notable despite the shifts in production techniques and reduction in formal regulatory obligations by Ofcom, to reflect the practical impact of Covid-19.

While local stations are delivering more and longer bulletins, national news and speech stations like *LBC* (with a bigger than ever online audience) have been providing up-to-the-minute commentary and updates to listeners across the country. *LBC's* Political Editor Theo Usherwood, who caught coronavirus early on and required hospital treatment, went back to the ward to explore how staff and other patients were coping in the crisis.

Across the Nations where devolved Government advice has differed from Westminster, local commercial radio stations have provided tailored bulletins that were relevant to their listeners.

## NEWS THAT GETS HEARD

Commercial radio is the perfect medium to provide breaking news flashes and provide up-to-the-minute updates on essential issues of national importance.

Recent research from the *Reuters Institute* also highlighted the low levels of news avoidance for radio during the pandemic, when compared to news on TV, newspaper brands and social media.

## AT THE HEART OF THE NEWS

As well as broadcasting regular news updates, commercial radio journalists have been at the forefront of breaking news. Stories are tailored to the relevant audiences of specific stations.

The examples included here are just a snapshot of the work undertaken by dedicated teams of professional journalists who have been working overtime since lockdown began.



Local stories go national – Stories carried on local and regional stations like *Heart* and *Capital* are often used on national stations like *LBC*, *LBC News* and *Classic FM*. The *Global* newsroom provided extra coverage of daily Government briefings.



Coronavirus Reality Check – The *Hits Radio Network* provided additional on-air segments with summaries of advice and guidance along with additional practical tips on keeping safe. Alongside the main news, a dedicated team looked at good news stories that explored the human impact of the pandemic, including uplifting examples of community spirit that moved listeners.



*KMFM* in Kent increased the proportion of local content in bulletins in order to focus on more relevant issues for their listeners.



*Isle of Wight Radio* questioned the Government at their daily briefing as the pilot track and trace scheme was trialled on the island giving their listeners a direct source of important and relevant information.



A number of Asian radio stations, including *Lyca Radio*, have also been translating important government messages in order to ensure that their listeners are able to understand this vital information.



*Fix Radio* introduced special programming for the construction industry with the aim of providing important advice to workers that were keen to return safely to work.

## GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN

Commercial radio has been an important vehicle for delivering essential Government updates, both through public health information ads and in updates within news bulletins.

Messages change rapidly, so radio has proved an extremely valuable tool to help deliver updated messages to huge audiences, often targeting demographics that are harder to reach through other media.

The Government recognised the important role played by commercial radio by significantly increasing its advertising campaign spend during this time. There is still scope for this to be expanded further and across other government agencies as restrictions continue to ease.





## **PUBLIC VALUE OUTPUT**

Commercial radio delivers a broad range of public value to listeners across the country. On average commercial stations provide 10 hours a week, made up of news & sport, travel, weather, local events and charity appeals.

This report touches on some of the impressive initiatives supported by broadcasters during Covid-19 in the following areas:

Charity and community

Mental health

Key workers

Diversity

Business support

Music and entertainment

Partnerships



## CHARITY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Commercial radio directly raised over £30m in charitable donations in 2019. This has continued in 2020 in difficult circumstances. Stations have been quick to help those most impacted by the devastating economic impact of the lockdown.

*Bauer's* national children's charity, *Cash for Kids*, launched an urgent appeal for families most at need as a result of school closures which disproportionately impact the most disadvantaged families.

*Global's* *Make Some Noise* charity also launched an Emergency Appeal across all of its stations. On 19 June this appeal raised an incredible £1.7m in a single day to help those hardest hit by coronavirus in our communities.



As well as direct fundraising support, broadcasters have also helped raise awareness of institutions in need. *Classic FM* had a royal first with HRH The Prince of Wales presenting two special programmes to highlight the impact of the coronavirus on revenues of British orchestras.

The industry has also rallied together in order to support the *National Bereavement Partnership* which has been providing an essential role to support those who have lost loved ones or those experiencing grief for those that they have cared for during these extraordinary times. Hundreds of stations have donated airtime to raise awareness of the website and helpline.

## SUPPORT FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Our sector is committed to supporting a broad range of mental health wellbeing issues. From campaigning in parliament for compulsory mental health first aiders in the workplace, to the *Mental Health Minute*, which has broadcast for its third consecutive year.

Recent high-profile campaigns include the *Mental Health Minute* which was broadcast across the entire radio industry at 10:59am on Monday 18 May to 20 million listeners on over 500 stations, including all BBC stations.

This included contributions from The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, England captain Harry Kane, singer-songwriter Dua Lipa, actor David Tennant and two-time heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua.



Another important mental health initiative that has been supported by commercial radio is the *#60SecondSupport* campaign. Radiocentre teamed up with the Royal Foundation and ten leading mental health charities to create a new series offering advice and activities to support the mental wellbeing of listeners.

## KEY WORKERS

DCMS provided early confirmation from that essential commercial radio staff were considered as 'key workers' under the Government definition. This was welcome as it meant that journalists, presenters, producers and technical support staff were able to move freely, travel for work where necessary and keep stations on air.

As well as providing news and information, commercial radio provides much needed entertainment at this time of national crisis. Key workers from other sectors have found the output of commercial stations a cherished lifeline.

Our sector has also provided support for initiatives such as the weekly *Clap for Carers* on a Thursday at 8pm by discussing the issue on air and reminding listeners of this through social media channels.

Presenters also backed early on the incredible fundraising effort spearheaded by Captain Tom Moore. Special interviews with Captain Tom helped to highlight his walking campaign with millions of listeners, many of whom generously donated to his campaign which raised over £32 million.

Bauer has also been supporting hospital radio. Their stations *KISS FM*, *Scala*, *Jazz FM*, and *Planet Rock* joined *Absolute Radio* in gifting shows until volunteers can get back in to their studios.

## DIVERSITY

Our industry is committed to being more representative of its listeners. Industry-wide monitoring is now undertaken annually by Ofcom, however last year we published a report, *Tuning In to Diversity*, which explored some of the initiatives undertaken by the industry, as well as exploring the make up of the smallest stations which are often the most diverse and not captured by Ofcom.

We work with Creative Access, a social enterprise that helps to try and improve the representation of young people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds and also those from a lower socio-economic background, to help young people to learn more about the industry and how to get ahead in radio. We have run a number of masterclasses in conjunction with the BBC in the past and are planning a series of cross-industry virtual events, with the first on 15 July.

The *Black Lives Matter* movement, which was propelled to prominence again in the UK after the killing of George Floyd in America, has been covered extensively by commercial radio. Hundreds of stations also demonstrated further support and recognised the significance of the protests here in the UK in a myriad of different ways.

Radiocentre will work with the entire industry over the coming months to explore collaborative ways that help further address the issues of underrepresentation of minority groups in our sector.

## BUSINESS SUPPORT

Commercial radio provides an impressive average Return on Investment (ROI) of £7.33 for every £1 invested in a radio campaign. Applying this to advertising revenues for the entire radio industry suggests a total ROI over £5.2bn, including more than £1.6bn for local advertisers, a significant boost for small local businesses.

During the pandemic, much of this income dried up as businesses were forced to close as part of lockdown. In response, a number of small stations have sought to support businesses at this time by working with local partners on schemes to provide donations of airtime and highlight their activities.

### Great examples of stations supporting local businesses



*Jack FM* launched a £100,000 advertising campaign fund for small businesses and charities in Oxfordshire with a series of airtime grants.



*Pure Radio Scotland* launched a community hub on their website where they promote and shine a spotlight on the services offered by local organisations, businesses and individuals during the pandemic.



*Chester's Dee 106.3* donated commercial advertising airtime to local charities and support groups, even producing their promotional ads for them free of charge.



*DC Thomson Media* has launched a Back to Business fund of advertisements worth £250,000 across radio, print and online to help boost local businesses returning to work.



*Asian Sound Radio* is offering local businesses two months of free advertising to help support and kickstart business across the Manchester and East Lancashire region.

## MUSIC AND ENTERTAINMENT

Music is the most important element for most commercial radio stations. With the lockdown presenting never seen before challenges, stations were keen to find new innovative ways in keeping audiences engaged and entertained during this daunting period while supporting the UK's creative industries.

### Here are just a few highlights that have provided listeners with an escape and new ways to enjoy music through radio



*Capital* produced a special best of the Summertime Ball, simulcast live on Sky One, with special interviews from pop stars including Jax Jones and Katy Perry appearing on the station to talk about what the event means to them.



*Absolute 40s* celebrated VE day in lockdown with hits from the decade entertaining listeners as they took part in socially distanced celebrations across the country.



Over the late May Bank Holiday weekend *Kiss FM* brought the vibes of the White Isle to the UK with *KISS Ibiza*, with exclusive mixes from top DJs.



*XS Manchester* broadcast a daily 3 minute speech comedy drama based on the empty streets of the city.



Over the Easter Bank Holiday weekend *Bauer* radio stations were able to broadcast 52 hours of live music programming – including virtual festivals and live sessions on *Jazz FM*, *Scala Radio*, *KISS FM*, *Kerrang Radio*, *Absolute Radio* and *Planet Rock*.

## PARTNERSHIPS



The *Young Audio Awards*, now in its second year, is a national competition launched by Radiocentre aimed at young people from all backgrounds to embrace all things audio, had to postpone the award ceremony, but the industry came together to run the event virtually and was watched by thousands on 7 May.



The *Audio Content Fund*, is a scheme supported by the Government to provide funding for original radio and audio production.

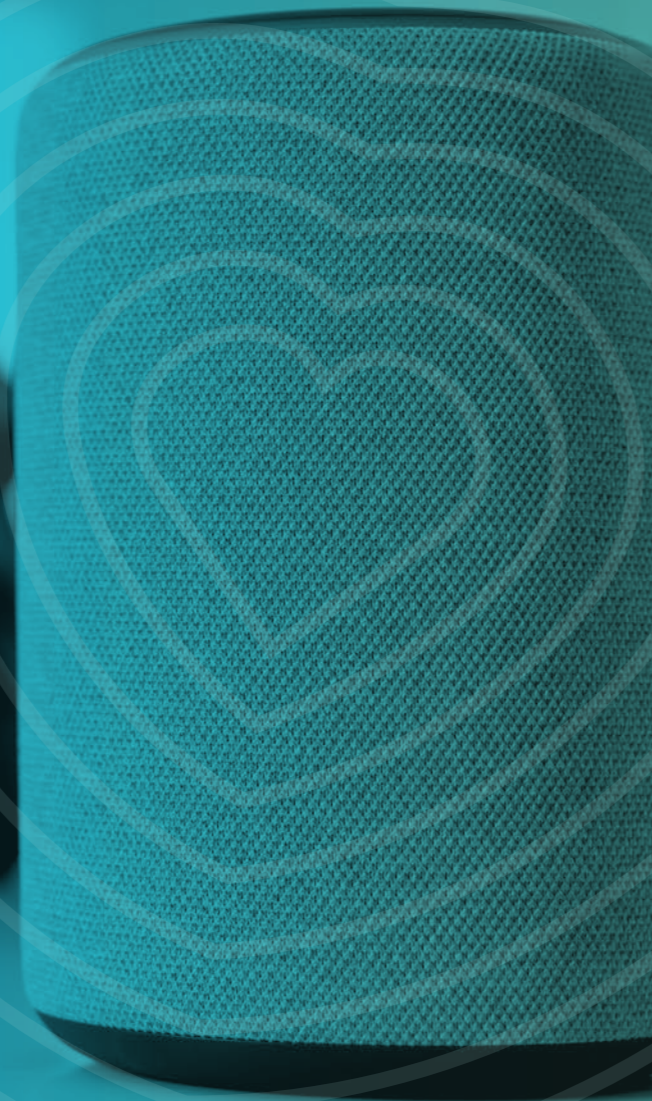
Commercial stations have been using the *Audio Content Fund* to build partnerships with independent production companies to deliver a range of content to help improve the lives of listeners.

The fund launched a special £400k Coronavirus Support Round in March 2020 which went on to provide funding for 28 projects.

## PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE AUDIO CONTENT FUND CORONAVIRUS SUPPORT ROUND

- |   |   |
|---|---|
|  Self Isolating with Lee & Dean<br>Short comedy sketches with two builders on lockdown                   |  All Together Now with Alex Lester<br>Daily show for older people, with experts and callers                          |
|  KISSFest: The World's Biggest Radio Rave<br>99hrs of dance mixes, from big names to bedroom DJs         |  Sports Squad<br>Inspiring and educational show with sporting guests giving their fitness tips                       |
|  Scala Radio Sessions Live<br>Live classical performances, all recorded remotely                         |  60 Second Support<br>Daily packages to help listeners with their mental health during lockdown.                     |
|  Kerrang! Radio's Lockdown Sessions<br>The best new rock artists, all recorded in their homes            |  Caring For Carers<br>Series of short interviews with carers and those they care for, shared with 100 local stations |
|  Planet Rock's Lockdown Sessions<br>Classic rock home-sessions compiled into a 3hr special               |  Absolute Radio 40s<br>One-day pop-up station for VE Day, with historical material and 1940s music                   |
|  Jazz FM's Virtual Jazz Festival<br>Live music from some of the world's biggest jazz acts               |  Sporting Memories<br>Conversations recorded to allow sporting reminiscence to help those with dementia             |
|  Absolute Radio's Front Room Festival<br>Snowpatrol, Elbow, Blossoms and more, live from the sofa      |  Heart's Hometown Heroes<br>Short audio blogs from keyworkers in your area   |
|  The Show Must Go On<br>Comedians and sports stars explore how they're coping with lockdown challenges |  Undiscussable<br>Exploring the rise in domestic violence during lockdown in the UK                                |
|  Manchester Adventures of Brian Hovis<br>Daily comedy adventure set on the empty city's streets        |  Cities of Sound<br>Music documentaries made by radio students and recent graduates across the UK                  |
|  Prime Timers<br>A show for over-70s, made by over-70s, shared across the community radio network      |  Monty Panesar In Self-Isolation With...<br>Former cricketer interviews high profile British Asians                |
|  Essential Voices<br>Powerful and emotional stories, shining a light on keyworkers around the UK       |  Virtual Strawberry Fair<br>12hr virtual festival to replace the cancelled, free one-day arts event in East Anglia |
|  Buddyline<br>Phone calls between u28s and over-65s, supporting each other during lockdown             |  Connections<br>A new five-part radio drama reflecting on how isolation is common for disabled people              |
|  Lockdown Love Letters<br>Beautifully crafted notes of appreciation between key-workers and families   |  Step Up<br>Programming to support Year 6 students transitioning to secondary school                               |
|  Unheard Voices<br>Short features giving a voice to the disabled community in South Wales              |  UK Radio Pride<br>14hrs of music, debate, and remembrance, in place of cancelled LGBT Pride events                |

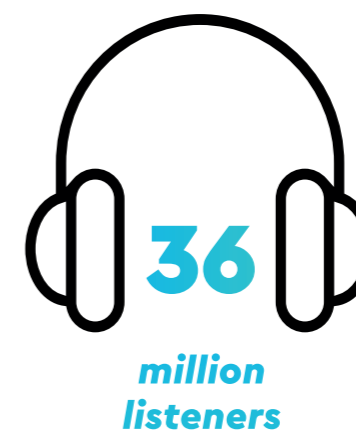
# COMMERCIAL RADIO IMPACT



## AUDIENCE

Each week, commercial radio reaches 36 million people (around 66% of the population) for an average of 13 hours.

Listeners to commercial stations represent a broad cross section of the population, with the sector attracting a significantly more ethnically and socially diverse audience than the BBC.



## TUNING IN MORE

Since the lockdown, radio stations and groups have reported an increase in online listening of around 15–20% on average, with news and information stations such as *LBC* seeing even higher increases of over 40%.

Many listeners changed the way that they traditionally listened, shifting from in car listening to online or digital radio in the home.



# 85%

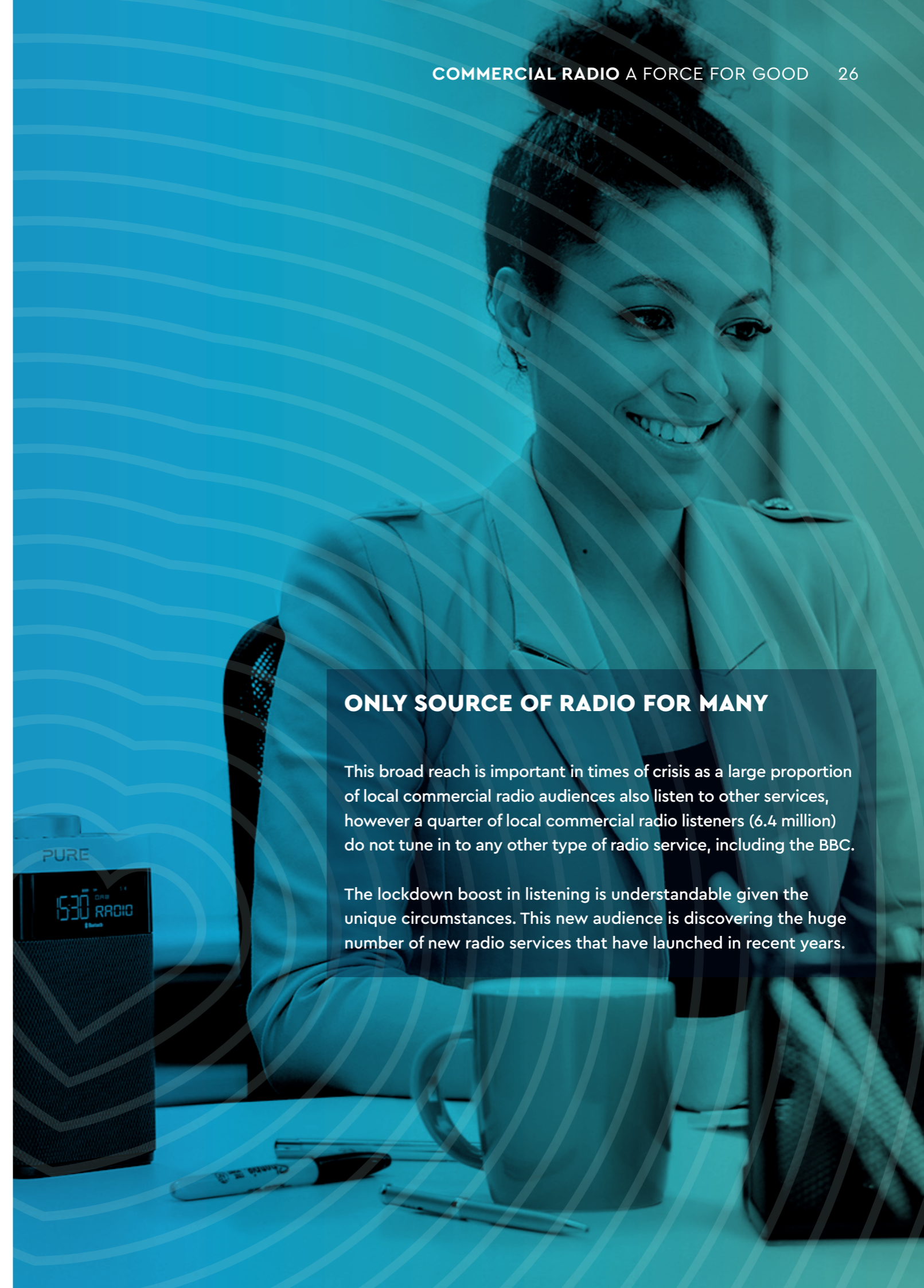
**of commercial radio listeners are  
listening to the same amount of radio  
OR more than before lockdown**

A significant proportion of this audience (38%) are listening for longer – an extra 1hr 45 minutes per week on average – boosting their total weekly listening to 26 hours a week.

## ONLY SOURCE OF RADIO FOR MANY

This broad reach is important in times of crisis as a large proportion of local commercial radio audiences also listen to other services, however a quarter of local commercial radio listeners (6.4 million) do not tune in to any other type of radio service, including the BBC.

The lockdown boost in listening is understandable given the unique circumstances. This new audience is discovering the huge number of new radio services that have launched in recent years.

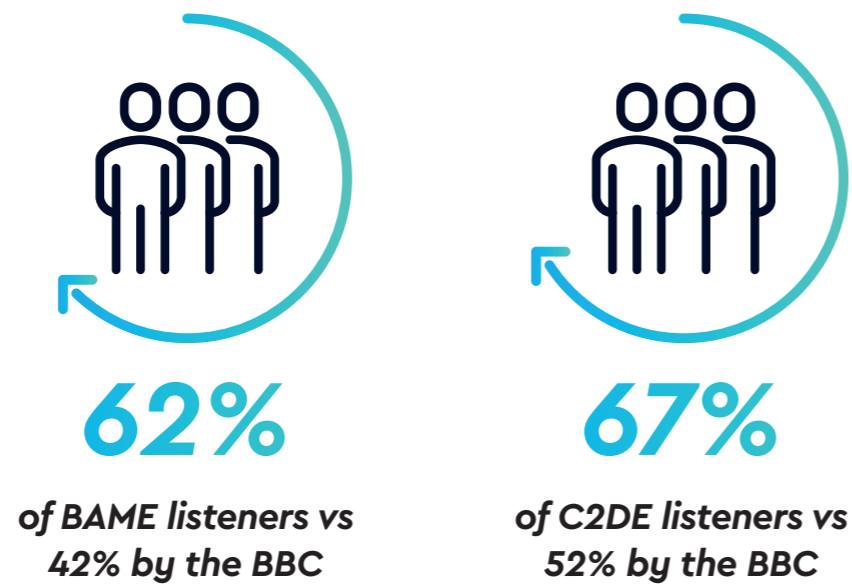


## DIVERSE AUDIENCE

Commercial radio listeners are more ethnically diverse than radio overall and from a broader range of socio-economic groups.

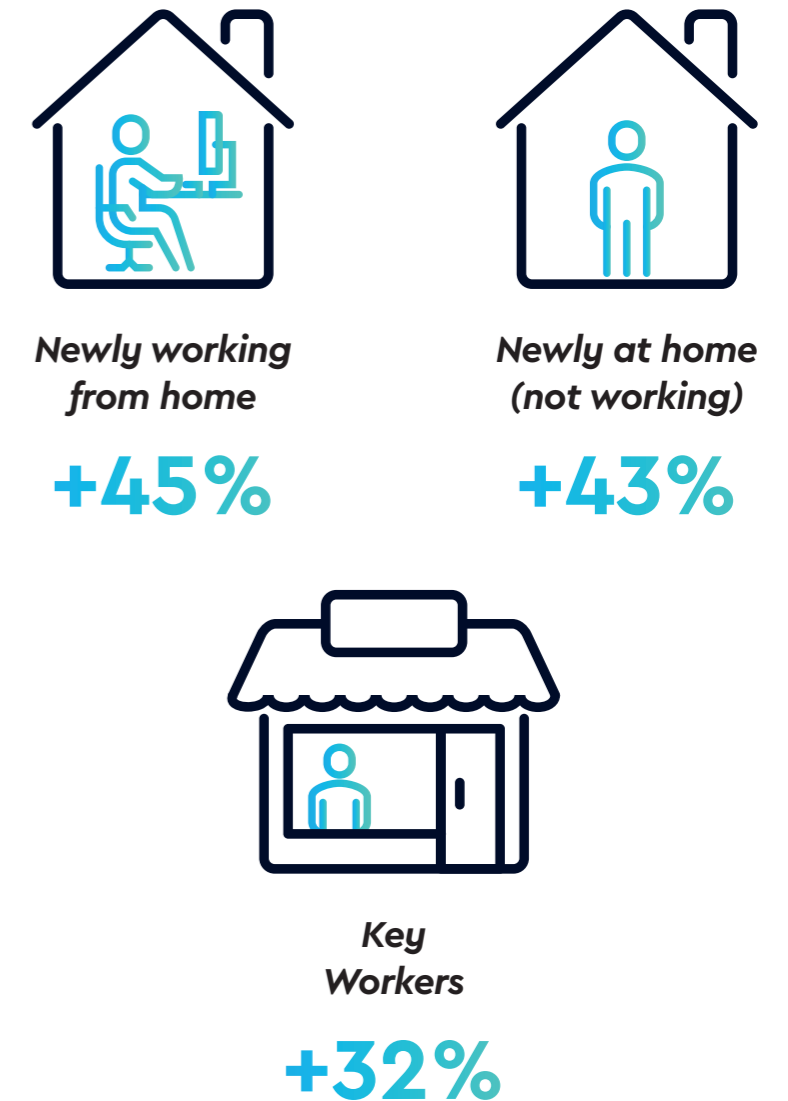
Commercial stations reach 62% of BAME listeners, compared to a 42% reach by BBC services. Our sector also reaches 67% of listeners considered to be in a lower socio-economic classification (C2DE), compared to 52% reached by the BBC.

### Commercial radio reaches



## WHO IS LISTENING MORE?

A new survey of commercial radio listeners conducted by research agency DRG in April 2020 highlighted that overall 38% of listeners are listening to more radio since lockdown, with some variance across different listener groups, as shown below.



## LISTENER IMPACT

Since lockdown there has been a huge spike in online and in home listening. This is understandable as radio provides important companionship to listeners, many of whom are more isolated than ever.

We know that many listeners are tuning in more, but we wanted to know more about this new audience so commissioned research agency DRG to explore how the coronavirus crisis has changed listening behaviour among commercial radio listeners in the short-term.



The reasons people give for listening longer to the radio as they spend more time at home are unsurprising and include the following:



*It keeps me in touch with the outside world*

**90%**

**Agree**



*It keeps me company*

**84%**

**Agree**



*It keeps me informed*

**89%**

**Agree**



*It delivers trusted news*

**64%**

**Agree**



*It makes me feel happy*

**77%**

**Agree**



## KEEPING THE NATION SMILING

It is clear that this new audience is turning to radio after a dramatic change in circumstances. As seen earlier in this report, key workers are also listening more during this stressful period.

Commercial radio is great at helping to lift the nation's mood. Here are just a few examples.

### Great examples of stations lifting spirits



*Nation Radio* is keeping the spirits of listeners up. Nurses contacted *Nation Radio Wales* for a shout out at the station helped to lift the spirits of key NHS workers.



*Panjab Radio* is proving an importance source of information, entertainment and company for its listeners. Presenter and station MD Surjit Ghuman was nominated by listeners as a community hero for his work on the station.



*Heart North East* has been helping to deliver summer vibes as the lockdown is gradually eased by searching for the fastest mixologists in the region with *Heart's Battle of the Bars*.



*Magic Radio* have a *Book Club* feature #ShelfIsolation where audiences share in an intimate look at the bookshelves of presenters and authors.



*Jack FM* responded to the restaurant, café and pub shutdowns across the country, launching a virtual pub on Facebook Live, bringing listeners together via social media.



*Fun Kids* launched a daily *Stuck at Home* podcast that includes things to do at home, ideas for activities and also has experts on to discuss the current crisis in a relevant tone for younger ones.

## SUPPORTING COMMERCIAL RADIO

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Commercial Radio, chaired by Andy Carter MP, works on behalf of the industry to highlight issues with parliamentarians, Government and Ofcom.

For more information on commercial radio or the APPG please contact Radiocentre's Head of Public Affairs:

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

Coronavirus Hub

Keeping the Nation Smiling

Tuning In to Diversity

Valuing Radio

Breaking News



## **ABOUT RADIOCENTRE**

**Radiocentre is the industry body for commercial radio. We work on behalf of more than 50 stakeholders who represent over 90% of commercial radio in terms of listening and revenue.**

**[www.radiocentre.org](http://www.radiocentre.org)**

