

# 16 The media

As in many other European countries, Britain's main newspapers and main TV channels are both in long-term decline; fewer and fewer people are reading the former or watching the latter. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, people became richer, so that they were able to pursue alternative forms of leisure activity. In addition, cheaper means of production and distribution meant that the main papers and the main channels found themselves with more rivals. More recently, there is the internet, which gives people not only a further form of leisure activity but also an alternative source for news. Nevertheless, the main papers and channels remain a central part of everyday national life.

## The importance of the national press

Newspaper publication in the country is dominated by the national press – an indication of the comparative weakness of regional identity in the country (see chapter 4). There are more than seventy local and regional daily papers, but the total circulation of all of them together is less than the combined circulation of the handful of national 'dailies'. The only non-national papers with significant circulations

### Different approaches, different subjects

Here are some details of the front pages of the national dailies for one date (23 July 2008). For each paper, the first line is the

main headline and the figures in brackets are the height of the letters used for it.

**DAILY  
STAR**

BIG BRO LIVE SEX SHOW (4.5 cm)  
Topic: events on the *Big Brother* TV programme  
Total text on page: 80 words

**DAILY  
Mirror**

OUR DESPAIR, OUR FURY, OUR FUTURE (4 cm)  
Topic: a couple whose baby is missing  
Total text on page: 125 words

**THE  
Sun**

PEACHES IN DRUGS OVERDOSE (5 cm)  
Topic: the activities of a celebrity  
Total text on page: 165 words

**Daily Mail**

PROSTATE PILL TO SAVE THOUSANDS (3.5 cm)  
Topic: progress in medical research  
Total text on page: 210 words

**DAILY EXPRESS**

SUPERMARKET PETROL PRICE BATTLE (4 cm)  
Topic: the price of petrol  
Total text on page: 270 words

**THE INDEPENDENT**

Captured (4 cm)  
Topic: the arrest of Radovan Karadzic (for war crimes)  
Total text on page: 210 words

**THE TIMES**

Cancer drug could save the lives of 10,000 a year (1.5 cm)  
Topic: progress in medical research  
Total text on page: 675 words

**theguardian**

Karadzic, Europe's most wanted man, arrested (1.5 cm)  
Topic: his arrest (for war crimes)  
Total text on page: 1,125 words

**The Daily Telegraph**

800,000 drinkers a year treated in hospital (1.5 cm)  
Topic: alcohol-related illnesses  
Total text on page: 1,510 words

are published in the evenings, when they do not compete with the national papers, which always appear in the mornings. The only exception to this pattern is in Scotland, where a number of Scotland-only papers (most notably *The Sunday Post*, *The Sunday Mail* and the *Daily Record*) sell more copies than most of the UK-wide papers in Scotland (which usually produce special Scottish editions anyway).

Most local papers do not appear on Sundays, so on that day the dominance of the national press is absolute. The 'Sunday papers' are so-called because that is the only day on which they appear. Some of them are sisters of a daily (published by the same company) but employ different editors and journalists.

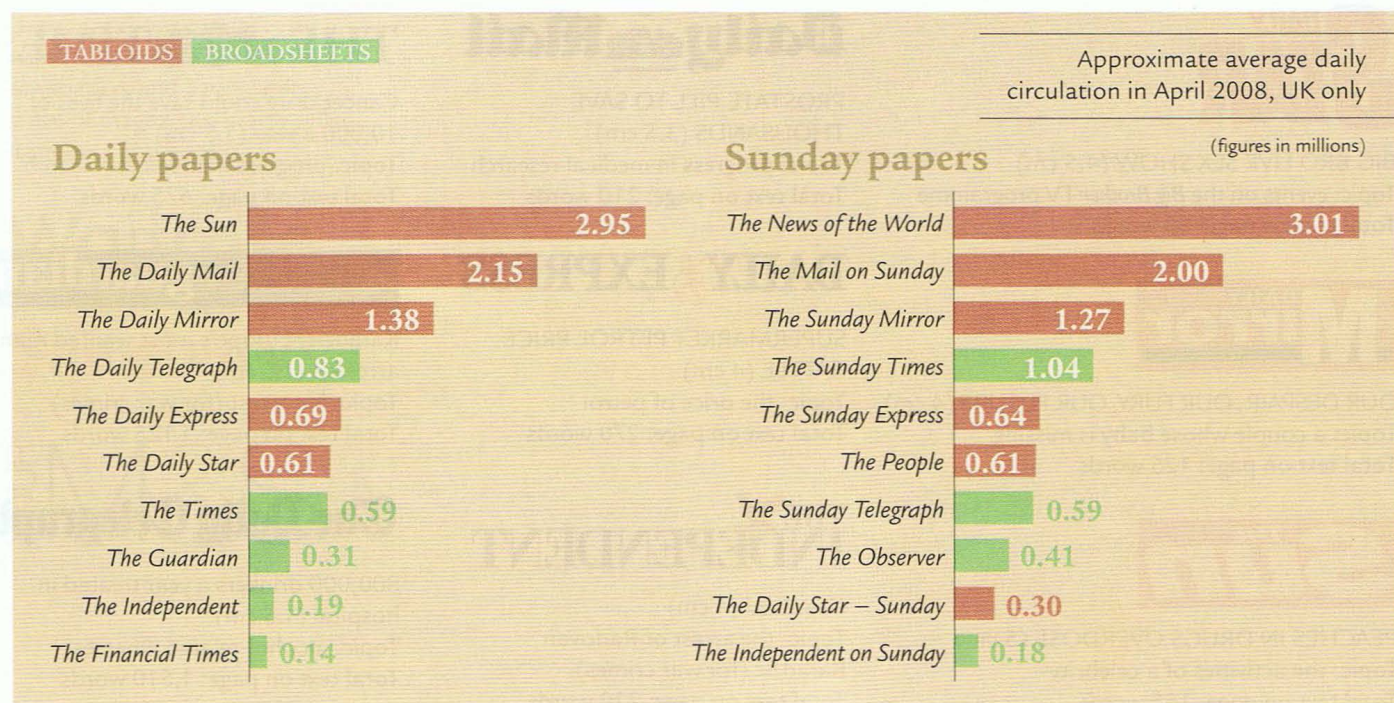
The morning newspaper is a British household institution – such an important one that, until the laws were relaxed in the early 1990s, newsagents were the only shops that were allowed to open on Sundays. People could not be expected to do without their newspapers for even one day, especially a day when there is more free time to read them. The Sunday papers are generally thicker than the dailies and some of them have six or more sections, making up a total of well over 200 pages.

Another indication of the importance of 'the papers' is the morning 'paper round'. Most newsagents organize these, and more than half of the country's readers get their morning paper delivered to their door by a teenager who gets up at around 5.30 a.m. every day in order to earn a bit of pocket money.

### How many do they sell?

As you can see, the 'popular' papers sell about four times as many copies as the 'qualities'. The gap, however, is much narrower than in past decades. In 1950, for example, they sold twenty times as many. But their sales have fallen greatly since that time. Overall,

newspaper circulation has declined by a third. It has declined especially sharply in the twenty-first century, probably, because of the internet, as well as the increasing number of free newspapers (which get their money from advertising).



## The two types of national newspaper

Conventionally, the national papers are divided into two distinct types. The quality papers cater for the better educated readers. The popular papers sell to a much larger readership. They contain far less print than the ‘qualities’ and far more pictures. They use larger headlines and write in a simpler style of English. While the qualities devote much space to politics and other ‘serious’ news, the popular papers concentrate on ‘human interest’ stories, which often means sex and scandal.

However, this method of classification has a hint of snobbery about it. It implies that a newspaper can’t be both high quality and popular at the same time. Perhaps this is why the two types have also been known by other names: the broadsheets and the tabloids. Not so long ago in Britain, if you saw someone reading a newspaper, you could tell what kind it was without even checking the title. This was because the quality newspapers were all printed on terribly large-sized paper known as broadsheet, so that to be able to read more than one page without looking like you had just taken up origami, you had to have expert page turning skills. The popular papers, on the other hand, were all tabloids; that is, they were printed on much smaller pages (which were therefore much easier to turn). But in 2004, two quality newspapers, *The Times* and *The Independent*, successfully adopted the tabloid format. And then, a year later, another quality, *The Guardian*, broke with tradition even more radically by adopting the Berliner format, which is halfway between broadsheet and tabloid and often used in continental Europe but never before in Britain. Again, the move was a success. And so, the tabloid/broadsheet distinction no longer fits the facts. However, it is still often used, in order to avoid the snobbery of the other method of distinction.

In any case, the differences between the two types can be exaggerated. The ‘qualities’ do not completely ignore sex and scandal or any other aspect of public life. Both types of paper devote equal amounts of attention to sport. Moreover, some people make a three-way distinction (*The Daily Mail* and *The Express* being in the middle). The differences are in the treatments of the topics covered and in which topics are given the most prominence.

## The characteristics of the national press: politics

The way politics is presented in the national newspapers is an example of the fact that British political parties are essentially parliamentary organizations, not countrywide ones (see chapter 6). Although different papers have differing political outlooks, none of the large newspapers is an organ of a political party. Many are often obviously in favour of the policies of this or that party (and even more obviously against the policies of another party) but none of them would ever use ‘we’ or ‘us’ to refer to a certain party (*Papers and politics*).

### The rest of the press

If you go into any well-stocked newsagent in Britain, you will not find only newspapers. You will also see rows and rows of magazines catering for almost every imaginable taste and specializing in almost every imaginable pastime. There are around 3,000 consumer magazines published in the country and about four million copies are sold every month. The vast majority of these sales are of ‘women’s interest’ magazines and (even more so) magazines which list all the TV and radio programmes for the coming week. The best known of these is the *Radio Times*, which also contains some fifty pages of articles. (Note the typically British appeal to continuity in the name ‘*Radio Times*’. The magazine was first produced before television existed and has never felt compelled to update its title.)

There are also a few publications dealing with news and current affairs. Partly because the national press is so predictable (and often so trivial), some of these periodicals, such as the *New Statesman* and *The Spectator*, are quite widely read. In terms of sales, two of them in particular stand out. One is the *Economist*, which is of the same type as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Der Spiegel* and *L’Express*. It is fairly obviously right of centre in its views, but the writing is very high quality and that is why it has the reputation of being one of the best weeklies in the world. (In fact, it sells five times as many copies abroad as it does in Britain itself.)

The other is very different. *Private Eye* is a satirical magazine which makes fun of all parties and politicians, and also makes fun of the mainstream press. It also has a serious side, unearthing corruption in public life. Because of this combination of, often rather ‘schoolboyish’, humour and investigative journalism, it is forever defending itself in legal actions.

What counts for the newspaper publishers is business. All of them want first and foremost to make money. Their primary concern is to sell as many copies as possible and to attract as much advertising as possible. The British press is mostly controlled by a rather small number of extremely large multinational companies. This fact helps to explain two notable features. One of these is its freedom from interference from government influence, which is virtually absolute. The press is so powerful in this respect that it is sometimes referred to as 'the fourth estate' (the other three being the Commons, the Lords and the monarch). This freedom is assisted by a general feeling in the country that 'freedom of speech' is a basic constitutional right.

### Papers and politics

None of the big national newspapers 'belongs' to a political party. Moreover, the tabloids devote relatively little space to politics. However, each paper has an idea of what kind of reader it is appealing to, and a fairly predictable political outlook. Each can therefore be seen, rather simplistically, as occupying a certain position on the right-left spectrum.

As you can see, the right seems to be over-represented in the national press. This is not because such a large majority of British people hold right-wing views. It is partly because the press tends to be owned by people with right-wing views. However, the owners normally put selling copies ahead of political viewpoint. *The Sun* for example, supported the Labour party during the 1970s. But just before the 1979 election, it came out in favour of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative party, which won the election. For the next 17 years, it was a strong supporter of the Conservative government. But two months before the 1997 election, when the opinion polls made it clear the Conservatives were not going to win again, it suddenly changed back to Labour!

In any case, a large number of readers are not very interested in the political coverage of a paper. They buy it for the sport, or the human interest stories and scandals, or something else. For these reasons, the descriptions below, although intended as humour, are perhaps more informative of the relation between the national dailies and politics. They are taken from the script of the political satire *Yes, Prime Minister*, in which the Prime Minister, Jim Hacker, is trying to reassure his two advisers, Sir Humphrey and Bernard, that he understands the British press.



*Hacker: I know exactly who reads the papers. The Daily Mirror is read by people who think they run the country. The Guardian is read by people who think they ought to run the country. The Times is read by people who actually do run the country. The Daily Mail is read by the wives of the people who run the country. The Financial Times is read by people who own the country. The Morning Star is read by people who think the country ought to be run by another country.<sup>1</sup> The Daily Telegraph is read by people who think it is.*

*Sir Humphrey: Prime Minister, what about people who read The Sun.*

*Bernard: Sun readers don't care who runs the country as long as she's got big tits.*

<sup>1</sup> *The Morning Star* is a socialist newspaper with a very small circulation (about 20,000). When this satire was written, it often supported the policies of the Soviet Union. That is the 'other country' in the extract.

<sup>2</sup> This newspaper's readers think that other countries have too much influence on British politics.

A striking example occurred during the Second World War. During this time, the country had a coalition government of both Conservative and Labour politicians – so that there was really no opposition in Parliament at all. At one time, the cabinet wanted to use a special wartime regulation to ban, temporarily, *The Daily Mirror*, which had been consistently critical of the government. At once, the Labour party, which until then had been completely loyal to the government, demanded a debate on the matter, and the other national papers, although they disagreed with the opinions of *The Mirror*, all leapt to its defence and opposed the idea. The government was forced to back down and *The Mirror* continued to appear throughout the war.

## The characteristics of the national press: sex and scandal

The other feature of the national press which is partially the result of its power and commercial orientation is its shallowness. Few other European countries have a popular press which is so 'low'. Some of the popular papers have almost given up even the pretence of dealing with serious matters. Apart from sport, their pages are full of little except the private lives of famous people. Sometimes, their 'stories' are not articles at all – they are just excuses to show pictures of almost-naked women. During the 1980s, page three of *The Sun* became infamous in this respect. The women who pose for its photographs are now universally known as 'page three girls'.

The desire to attract more readers at all costs has meant that, in the late twentieth century, even the broadsheets in Britain can look rather 'popular' when compared to equivalent 'quality' papers in some other countries. They are still serious newspapers containing high-quality articles whose presentation of factual information is usually reliable. But even they now give a lot of coverage to 'human interest' stories when they have the excuse.

This emphasis on revealing the private details of people's lives has led to discussion about the possible need to restrict the freedom of the press. This is because, in behaving this way, the press has found itself in conflict with another British principle which is as strongly felt as that of freedom of speech – the right to privacy. Many journalists now appear to spend their time trying to dig up the juiciest secrets about well-known personalities, or just ordinary people who, by chance, find themselves connected with some newsworthy situation. There is a widespread feeling that, in doing so, they behave too intrusively.

Complaints regarding invasions of privacy are dealt with by the Press Complaints Commission (PCC). This organization is made up of newspaper editors and journalists. In other words, the press is supposed to regulate itself. Many people are not happy with this arrangement and various governments have tried to formulate laws on the matter. However, at the time of writing, no such law has been passed. Against the right to privacy, the press has successfully been able to oppose the concept of the public's 'right to know'.

Of course, Britain is not the only country where the press is controlled by large companies with the same single aim of making profits. So why is the British press more frivolous? The answer may lie in the function of the British press for its readers. British adults never read comics. These publications, which consist entirely of picture stories, are read only by children. It would be embarrassing for an adult to be seen reading one. Adults who want to read something very simple, with plenty of pictures to help them, have nowhere to go but the national press. Most people don't use newspapers for 'serious' news. For this, they turn to another source – broadcasting.

### Broadcasting House

Situated in central London Broadcasting House is the headquarters of the BBC.



### The BBC

Just as the British Parliament has the reputation for being 'the mother of parliaments', so the BBC might be said to be 'the mother of information services'. Its reputation for impartiality and objectivity in news reporting is, at least when compared to news broadcasting in many other countries, largely justified. Whenever it is accused of bias by one political side, it can always point out that the other side has complained of the same thing at some other time – so the complaints are evenly balanced. In fact, the BBC is rather proud of the fact that it gets complaints from both sides of the political divide, because this testifies not only to its impartiality but also to its independence.

Interestingly, though, this independence is as much the result of habit and common agreement as it is the result of its legal status. It is true that it depends neither on advertising nor (directly) on the government for its income. It gets this from the licence fee which everybody who uses a television set has to pay. However, the government decides how much this fee is going to be, appoints its

### High ideals and independence

Below is an inscription to be found in the entrance to Broadcasting House (the BBC's first purpose-built headquarters). The reference to one

man in the inscription is appropriate. British politicians were slow to appreciate the social significance of 'the wireless' (this is what the radio was generally known as

until the 1960s). Moreover, being British, they did not like the idea of having to debate culture in Parliament. They were only too happy to leave the matter to a suitable organization and its Director General, John (later Lord) Reith. Reith was a man with a mission. He saw in the radio an opportunity for education and initiation into high culture for the masses. He included light entertainment in his programming, but only as a way of capturing an audience for the more 'important' programmes of classical music and drama, and discussions of various topics by famous academics and authors who Reith had persuaded to take part.

THIS TEMPLE TO THE ARTS AND MUSES IS DEDICATED  
TO ALMIGHTY GOD  
BY THE FIRST GOVERNORS  
IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1931  
JOHN REITH BEING DIRECTOR GENERAL  
AND THEY PRAY THAT THE GOOD SEED SOWN  
MAY BRING FORTH GOOD HARVESTS  
THAT ALL THINGS FOUL OR HOSTILE TO PEACE  
MAY BE BANISHED HENCE  
AND THAT THE PEOPLE INCLINING THEIR EAR  
TO WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE LOVELY AND HONEST  
WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE OF GOOD REPORT  
MAY TREAD THE PATH OF VIRTUE  
AND OF WISDOM

board of governors and its director-general, has the right to veto any BBC programme before it has been transmitted and even has the right to take away the BBC's licence to broadcast. In theory, therefore, it would be easy for a government to influence what the BBC does.

Nevertheless, partly by historical accident (*High ideals and independence*), the BBC began, right from the start, to establish its effective independence and its reputation for impartiality. This first occurred through the medium of radio broadcasts to people in Britain. Then, in 1932 The BBC World Service was set up, with a licence to broadcast first to the empire and then to other parts of the world. During the Second World War, it became identified with the principles of democracy and free speech. In this way the BBC's fame became international. Today, the World Service still broadcasts around the globe, in English and several other languages. The BBC also runs ten national radio stations inside Britain and several local ones (*BBC Radio*).

## Television: organization

TV channels in general are also independent of government interference. This again is largely a matter of tacit agreement. There have been occasions when the government has successfully persuaded the BBC not to show something. But there have also been many occasions when the BBC has refused to bow to government pressure. Similarly, when the government or some other public body criticizes the BBC for its behaviour, the BBC sometimes accepts the criticism and apologizes (and one or more of its top people resign), and sometimes successfully argues its case and refuses to apologize.

There is no advertising on the BBC. But Independent Television (ITV), which started in 1954, gets its money from advertisements. ITV is a network of commercial companies, each of which is responsible for programming in different parts of the country on the single channel given to it. In practice, these companies cannot afford to make all their own programmes, and so they generally share those they make. As a result, it is common for exactly the same programme to be showing on the ITV channel throughout the country (just like on the BBC).

When commercial television began, it was feared that advertisers would have too much control over programming and that the new channel would exhibit all the worst features of tabloid journalism. Over the years, however, these fears have proved to be unfounded. Although commercial TV has recently adopted the habit of allowing programmes to be 'sponsored' by other commercial companies, as a form of advertising for them, these advertisers do not have the influence over programming that they have often had in the USA. Most importantly for the structure of commercial television, ITV news is not made by the individual companies. Independent Television News (ITN) is a separate company. For this and other reasons, it has always been protected from commercial influence. There is no significant difference between the style and content of ITN news and BBC news.

### BBC radio

**Radio 1** began in 1967. Devoted almost entirely to pop music, its birth was a signal that popular youth culture could no longer be ignored by the country's established institutions.

**Radio 2** also broadcasts popular music but less contemporary than that on Radio 1. At the time of writing it is Britain's most popular radio station.

**Radio 3** is devoted to classical music.

**Radio 4** broadcasts a variety of programmes, from plays and comedy shows to consumer advice programmes and in-depth news coverage. It has a small but dedicated following.

**Radio 5** is largely given over to sports coverage and news. Because of all the sport, it is sometimes referred to as 'Radio Bloke'. ('Bloke' is an informal word for a man which emphasizes male interests.)

Two particular radio programmes should be mentioned. Soap operas are normally associated with television (see below), but *The Archers* is actually the longest-running soap in the world. It describes itself as 'an everyday story of country folk'. Its audience, which is mainly middle-class with a large proportion of elderly people, cannot compare in size with the television soaps, but it has become so famous that everybody in Britain knows about it and tourist attractions have been designed to capitalize on its fame.

Another radio 'institution' is the live commentary of cricket test matches in the summer (see chapter 21).

### The traditional TV channels

Although British households can now receive tens of channels, there are still five main channels. They are:

**BBC1** (founded 1936)

**ITV** (1954)

**BBC2** (1964)

**Channel 4** (1982)

**Five** (launched as 'Channel 5' in 1997).

They are 'big' because everybody with a TV has access to them and they have been broadcasting for the longest, so that people are used to them. Their popularity is reflected in viewing figures and in magazines with programme listings such as the *Radio Times* (where more space is given to them than other channels).

### Glued to the TV

As long ago as 1953, it was estimated that 20 million viewers watched the BBC's coverage of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. By 1970, 94% of British households had a television set, mostly rented rather than bought. Now, 99% of households have one (mostly bought). Moreover, television broadcasting in Britain has expanded to fill every part of every day of the week. The main channels are never off air.

A survey reported in early 1994 that 40% of British people watched more than three hours of television every day. By 2005, this figure had fallen to 23%. But since then, with so many more channels and interactive services available, the percentage has been rising again. Television news is watched every day by more than half of the population. As a result, its presenters are among the best-known names and faces in the whole country – one of them once boasted that he was more famous than royalty!

The same fears that had been expressed about the quality of television when ITV started are now heard with regard to satellite and cable television. To some extent, these fears may be more justified, as the companies that run channels in this way are in exactly the same position as those which own the major newspapers (and in some cases actually are the same companies). In any case, new technology has meant that instead of just the few channels they had been used to (*The traditional TV channels*), British households now have access to a vast number of channels, so they just have to become more discriminating themselves.

## Television: style

Although the advent of ITV did not affect television coverage of news and current affairs, it did cause a change in the style and content of other programmes shown on television. The amount of money that a television company can charge an advertiser depends on the expected number of viewers at the time when the advertisement is to be shown. Therefore, there was pressure on ITV from the start to make its programmes popular. In its early years, ITV captured nearly three-quarters of the BBC's audience. The BBC then responded by making its own programming equally accessible to a mass audience.

Ever since then, there has been little significant difference in the programming of the BBC and the main commercial television channels. All show a wide variety of programmes, including news, documentaries, drama, films, light entertainment, comedies, and sports. They are in constant competition with each other to get the largest audience (this is known as the ratings war). But this competition does not mean that they each try to show a more popular type of programme than the other. Rather it means that each tries to do the same type of programme 'better'.

Of particular importance in the ratings war are the performances of the channels' various soap operas. These are also of interest because of what they can show about British attitudes and taste. The two most popular and long-running of these, which are shown at least twice a week, are not glamorous American productions showing rich and powerful people. They are ITV's *Coronation Street*, which is set in a working-class area near Manchester, and BBC1's *EastEnders*, which is set in a working-class area of London. They and other British-made soaps certainly do not paint an idealized picture of life. They depict relatively ordinary lives in relatively ordinary circumstances. The same is largely true of British situation comedies (known as 'sitcoms'). These are usually about people less fortunate and/or less able and/or less popular than the average. These people often have plans to be especially successful and popular, but the plans always fail.

It became obvious in the 1960s that the popularity of soap operas and light entertainment shows meant that there was less room for programmes which lived up to the original educational aims of television.



This was the main impetus for the founding of two other big channels (BBC2 and Channel 4), which acted as the main promoters of learning and 'culture'. To some extent they still do this. But the vast choice of channels now available means that this 'public service' is less essential.

### The ratings: a typical week

Ten million viewers may look like a lot. But in fact it is far fewer than the number which the most popular soaps used to get. In 1994, *Coronation Street* used to get 18 million viewers per week. In the 1970s, the most popular programmes used to get more than 20 million viewers. But now people have so much more choice. Some people are sad about this because it means that they do not have as much shared experience as they used to have.

The chart below shows the 30 most watched programmes on the main channels in the second week of April 2008 (the top 18 from BBC1 and ITV1 and the top 12 from BBC2 and Channel 4). The ratings are dominated by three broad types of programme.

**Soaps** All of these are set in England (*Coronation Street*, *EastEnders*, and *Emmerdale*).

**Soap-style dramas** Three of these are set in a hospital (*Casualty*, *Holby City*, and *House*). The others are *The Bill* and *Crime Scene Investigation*, which are about the police, *Shameless*, which is about a family on welfare, and *Desperate Housewives*, set in an American suburb. The last two of these incorporate comedy into the drama.

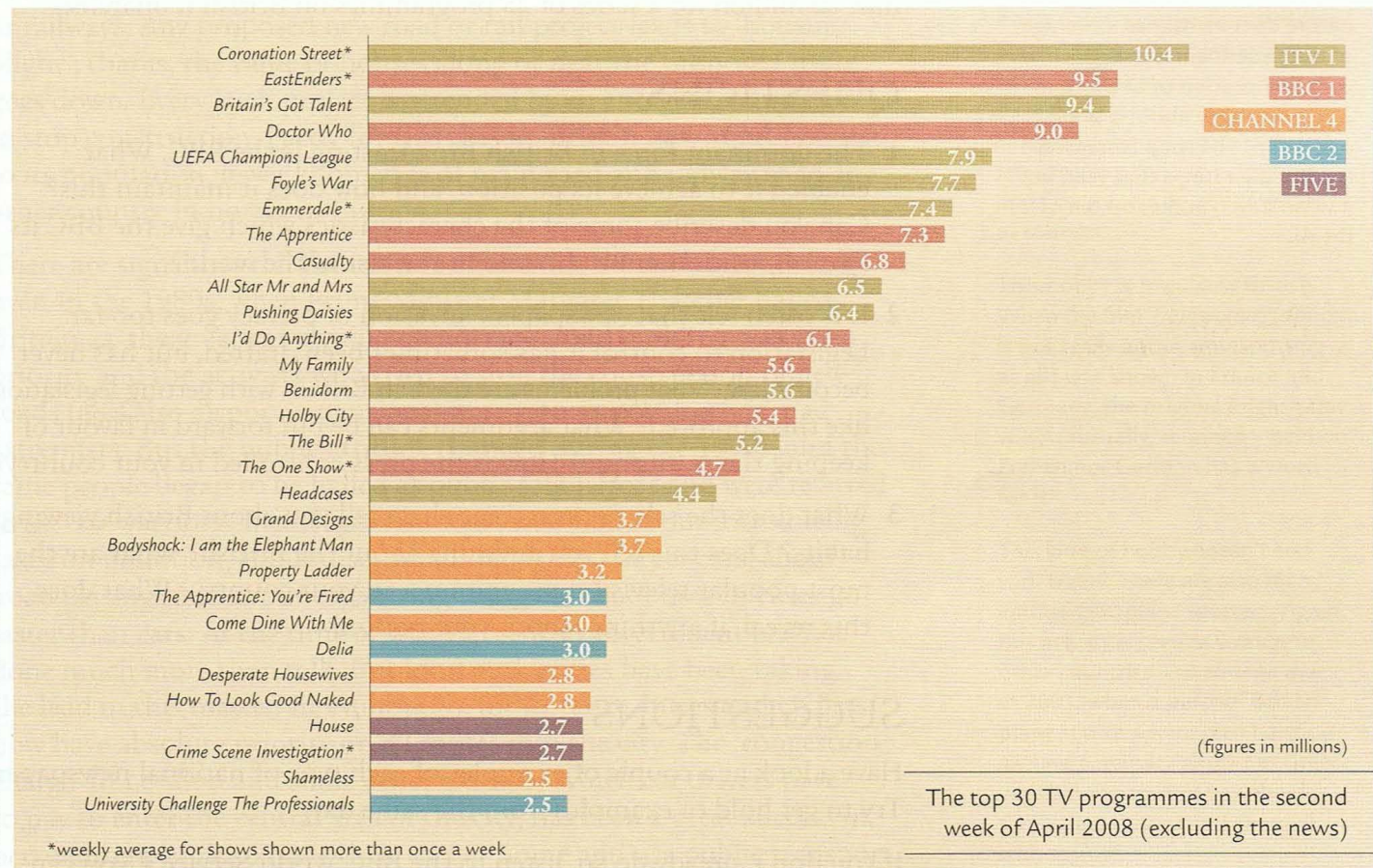
**Reality TV shows** There are two types of these. In *Britain's Got Talent*, *The Apprentice*, *All Star Mr and Mrs*, *I'd Do Anything*, and *Come Dine With Me*, people compete against each other for some sort of prize. In *Grand Designs*, *Property Ladder*, and *How To Look Good Naked*, people are assisted by experts to improve some aspects of their lives.

There are three comedy programmes in the list. *My Family* and *Benidorm* are situation comedies, while *Headcases* is a satirical sketch show. *Pushing Daisies* is a comedy drama.

The list includes one documentary programme (*Bodyshock: I am the Elephant Man*). *Doctor Who* is a science-fiction drama. *Foyle's War* is a period drama. There is one sports broadcast (*UEFA Champions League*) and one quiz programme (*University Challenge*).

*The One Show* is a general interest, 'soft news' magazine programme. *Delia* is a conventional cookery programme.

Only four of the programmes in the list are American (*Desperate Housewives*, *Crime Scene Investigation*, *House*, and *Pushing Daisies*).



### What do the British really like to watch?

All TV producers want their programme to make it to the top of the ratings. The fact that more people are watching your show than others is supposedly an indication of its popularity. But are all those people really watching your show? Many households, after all, just happen to have the TV switched on at certain times of day. And even if they are actually watching, does that mean they enjoy it? Some interesting results of a BBC survey were released in 2006 and the answers to these questions seem to be 'no'.

The Appreciation Index (AI) is a score from 0 to 100 given to each programme which is based on the weekly diaries kept by thousands of viewers around Britain. In 2004, the set of programmes which topped the AI figures were completely different from those which typically topped the ratings. They included a New Year's Day concert, several nature documentaries, coverage of the sixtieth anniversary commemoration of D-Day and a documentary about a brain operation. The soap *EastEnders* topped the ratings that year, but it wasn't even in the top ten of the AI.

Mass television programming is now more than half a century old. This means that TV channels have large and ever-expanding larger archives at their disposal. As a result, they can show (cheaply) numerous programmes based on lists: the top 100 comedy shows, the 20 favourite soaps, the 100 best ever music videos, and so on. Many people find these programmes either tedious or irritating (because not enough time is given to each item in the list). But the programme *The 50 Greatest Documentaries*, shown in 2005, was a reminder that, despite all the soaps and all the programmes which go by the misleading name of 'reality TV', Britain has made, and can still make, really good television. Among the top ten were the natural history series, *Life on Earth*, and the art history series *Civilization*, both from the 1970s, and the heart-rending story of a man with a rare fatal disease (*The Boy Who Skin Fell Off*) from 2004. But the winner was a series of films almost as old as TV itself. Intended as a 'one-off' to show the divisions in social class which existed in 1950s Britain, *Seven Up* showed the lives of 20 seven-year-olds from different backgrounds. It captured the public imagination, so seven years later, the same children were revisited for a second programme. This too was rated a success and in 2005, the seventh programme in the series (*49 Up*) was shown.

In any case, perhaps worries about the 'dumbing down' of British television are unfounded. In 2002, for instance, the highest paid performer on British TV was not an actor or actress, not a sports presenter or game-show host, not even a newsreader. It was a history professor called David Starkey! (In that year, Channel 4 arranged to pay him £2 million for a series of 25 programmes on British monarchs.)

## QUESTIONS

- 1 The dominant force in British Broadcasting is the BBC. What enabled it to achieve its position, and how does it maintain this? Can you describe some of the characteristics which give the BBC its special position in Britain and in the rest of the world?
- 2 It is often felt that newspapers' invasion of privacy goes too far. Legislation to control it has sometimes been drafted, but has never become law. What problems are there in Britain with getting legislative like this approved? What arguments can be put forward in favour of keeping the status quo? How is the press controlled in your country?
- 3 What does the television ratings chart tell you about British viewing habits? Does this tell you anything about the British? What are the most popular television programmes in your country? What does this reveal, if anything, about your nation?

## SUGGESTIONS

Have a look at a couple of examples of each type of national newspaper. Try to get hold of examples from the same day.

If you don't already do so, listen to the BBC World Service if you can.