A comparison of new British community radio stations with established Australian community radio stations

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Abstract

A community radio pilot scheme was run in the UK during 2002 and the pilot stations have been allowed to continue operating pending the first full licensing process, which took place in 2005 and 2006.

This paper is the first report of a study conducted in the summer of 2005. The study examined a sample of new UK community radio stations and compared these with a sample of established Australian stations, which parallels the UK group, for example urban stations, communities of interest and geographic communities. Community radio is well established in Australia and serves wide and diverse audiences. The study of these stations will help give a 'vocabulary' of terms with which to examine UK stations and also give indicators as to good practice and measurements of success.

Introduction

What is the actual essence of 'community radio' as opposed to any other form of radio? Regulatory bodies and licensing authorities such as Ofcom (Office for Communications) in the United Kingdom and the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) provide legal definitions, but for day to day community broadcasters, a working definition might be that community radio uses the medium by non-professional broadcasters in a way that directly benefits a target audience that is not well catered for by mainstream professional radio. It is also agreed that it should be 'not-for-profit', although financial turnover varies greatly. Often, the station will also be organised in a way that encourages 'ownership' by its mainly volunteer broadcasters and its audience. This may be a literal ownership, they may be voting members of the company or functional owners. They will have a direct and clear influence on the running of the station. One of the problems encountered immediately on studying community radio is that there is little agreement on a definition, although outwardly many agree that it is beneficial to society in a multitude of ways. What also becomes clear is that there is a huge enthusiasm for community radio from many different quarters but this does lead to a lack of objectivity in the written material and reports concerning community radio. During research one community radio practitioner called this unfailing good news, 'The Rah Rah Story.' In the UK this appears to come from a feeling that community radio having only just been legitimised in 2004, very late in world terms, needs all the friends it can get and any criticism should be conducted behind closed doors. However this has led to some mythologies, which need challenging if community radio in the UK is to grow and develop effectively and become as valued a part of the broadcasting arena as it is in Australia. One hundred and seven UK community licences have been issued in the first round. Although at the time of writing not all of these are yet on air.

Australian community radio has existed for over 30 years. There are now more than 300 serving distinct geographic areas, both urban and rural, discrete populations and various specialist interests in terms of the broadcast material. The sector is well established but is still developing. With the cultural links that Australia shares with the UK, it would seem to be a good model to examine with a view to discovering what has happened during the

past thirty years and how those involved feel about community radio. How might the UK sector benefit from Australia's prior experience and expertise? This paper is a report of the research and does not document the statistical evidence of its findings, but seeks to draw out the themes and issues which presented themselves as current debates.

Methodology

The Australian research was informed by Forde, Meadows and Foxwell's study of the value of the Australian community radio sector (2002) and the early report of their qualitative study of audiences (Meadows, Forde, Ewart and Foxwell 2005), which followed the quantitive study of McNair Ingenuity (2004). As yet there are no comparable studies in the UK.

This research was particularly aided by the work of Everitt (2003a and 2003b) who conducted an evaluation of the original pilot scheme in the UK for the then regulatory body, the Radio Authority. The methodology follows his example and has been conducted by fieldwork, personal interviews and an examination of literature and documentation, both in the UK and Australia. During the UK Access radio pilot scheme, which started in 2002, the 16 pilot stations were visited. In the summer of 2005, the new UK regulator, Ofcom, was issuing full-time licences and as the pilot stations, which were still on air, were licensed they were revisited. During July and August 2005, thanks to British Academy funding, a sample of stations in Australia was visited. The sample was based partly on pragmatism due to the size of the country and deliberately to parallel the stations visited in the UK. In the end 15 Australian stations were visited as well as two of the umbrella organisations, the Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF) and the Community Broadcasting of Australia Association (CBAA). A further group of seven Australian stations and ACMA were visited during April 2006.

All the stations in the UK and Australia were personally visited and semi-structured interviews conducted with key staff and personnel. The interviews covered the areas of funding, ownership and organisational structures, programme content, staff and volunteers and the audience. Written documentation and material was also gathered and examined to support and enhance the information gained by the interviews and vice versa.

Limitations of the study

The sample used is not statistical, but based on the stations selected by the UK Radio Authority for the original UK Access pilot, and Australian stations which roughly paralleled the UK stations in terms of audience and content, and which were accessible.

It should be acknowledged that community radio is important internationally in many third world areas where it has been found to be of benefit to communities that are isolated not just by geography, culture or artistic preferences but by serious social, economic and political conditions. In world terms the stations in the UK and Australia are serving relatively literate and affluent audiences.

It must also be noted that in both the UK and in Australia the research was aided by the tremendous enthusiasm and welcome received at stations. At no time was there any suggestion that there was a clandestine agenda or material that should not be examined or discussed. However within this paper some matters are regarded as confidential and those involved are deliberately not identified.

Overview
Community radio was first licensed in Australia in the early 1970s and in June 2005
CBOnline reported 359 fully licensed stations and a further 40 temporary licensees.
(2005). These cater for metropolitan, suburban, rural and remote audiences, the majority,
63 percent, being general stations, but the others providing for indigenous, ethnic and
specialist audiences (Meadows, Forde, Ewart and Foxwell 2005:172).

In the UK, community radio has had keen supporters and advocates going back to the
1970s, when it was developing in Australia and other countries (Lewis and Booth 1989:
133-137). There was a short period in the mid 1980s when it seemed that it might
develop legitimately, but the Home Office, who at that time held responsibility for
broadcast licensing, dropped this plan as it became politically sensitive (Gordon 2000:7-
9).

The UK cities have a number of pirate stations operating, some of which feel that they
represent the community radio movement. Pirate radio has influenced regulation and
mainstream broadcasting in the UK, notably during the late 1960s, but there is a less
obvious link in more recent times. Arguably the inclusion and legitimising of community
radio in the *Communications Act* 2004, owes more to committed individuals in positions
where they could influence legislation rather than an up-swelling of popular support for
pirate radio stations.

One of the key issues for UK community radio that does not affect the Australian sector
to such a degree is the issue of spectrum space and frequency allocation. The diffuse
nature of the Australian population and the size of the landmass, means that there is less
pressure on radio spectrum than in the UK. Despite this, Australian community
broadcasters still felt that spectrum space was an issue, particularly in urban areas.
Australian radio stations have very high power transmitters. In Sydney, a city-wide
'metro' station, such as FBI is transmitting at 1500 watts and the suburban 'sub-metro'
station, Eastside has a power of 250watts. This compares to UK urban stations, such as
Awaz (Glasgow) or Resonance (London), which typically transmit at a power of 25 watts.

Programme content
There is a consensus amongst community radio practitioners that community radio
should be in some way more directly beneficial to society than mainstream commercial or
public service radio. However this is where the agreement ends. Some practitioners feel
that the act of communicating to others via the airwaves will itself bring huge benefits
and community radio may be given validation by referring to the human right to
communicate (CMA 2006). The stress here is on the community broadcaster's right to
communicate via the airwaves. However to other practitioners, community radio is
justified by the pleasure gained by an individual listener who is linked by radio to a
community in which they feel personally involved, valued and comforted, in a way that
they do not feel when listening to a professional broadcasting organisation.

Under the terms by which they were set up, the UK stations have to show 'social gain'.
This is defined as the achievement of the community served and then elaborates as this
being the provision of radio for underserved groups; promoting discussion and opinion;
providing training and strengthening understanding and links (HMSO 2004).

The older and more established Australian community stations evidently bring pleasure
and delight to both audience and broadcasters in many terms (see Forde, Meadows and

Foxwell 2002; McNair 2004). This may lead to social benefits but some of these may be indirect and hard to quantify, for example, the growth in self-esteem of a recent central European migrant, who hears their own language broadcast on the ethnic community station, 6EBA in Perth (Nikolich, 15th August 2005). The effects of community radio may be a long-term investment, for example amongst the volunteers on the youth music station, SYN in Melbourne, who continue to develop and uphold the value of Australian contemporary music (Ives, 14th July 2005). It may also be of immediate use, for example, to a listener who hears an early warning of bad weather in their remote coastal area (Forde, Meadows and Foxwell 2002: 19).

There are several opposing arguments that emerge when discussing community radio programming and content.

In terms of localness there are two issues. Firstly it is argued that content on community stations should be geographically 'local' in its generation, production and subject matter. For example, Australians are very aware of the attraction of commercial, contemporary music produced in North America and Europe. FBI in Sydney fulfil not only the general obligation that every Australian community radio station has to play 25 percent Australian originated music (ACMA, 2002) but they also regularly play Sydney originated music to showcase and support the city's musicians and music industry. The station manager, Stuart Buchanan, (11th August 2005) feels that this is part of their community remit. However on the other hand, a 'community' may be a community of interest and therefore be more widespread geographically. CBAA general manager, Barry Melville (11th August 2005), noted that a community station can link a dispersed group and forge a community. Programme content needs to be relevant to the general audience but not necessarily 'local' to each listener. The remote and indigenous Australian stations have sustaining satellite services, which provide programming, which is not local geographically but is relevant to the respective audiences.

It may be felt that programme content is vitally important because community radio provides content not heard elsewhere on the broadcast spectrum. It gives a voice to those under-represented in the media. The broadcasters represent a wider community, that may go unheard by the rest of society or not otherwise have their own issues discussed on a media platform. However there is also a view that actual programme content is not so very important because the act of broadcasting will bring self-esteem and skills to those volunteers who create it and the reception of broadcasting that directly reflects a given community will bring self-esteem to that community. Furthermore it is argued that because community radio listeners tune in to hear a local sound, they are less concerned with a polished professional broadcast (Radio Regen 2006).

Related to these arguments are others about the relationship with commercial and public service broadcasters. In Australia community broadcasters felt that the commercial stations liked the community stations because they serve communities that the commercial stations do not particularly wish to, in particular small or dispersed audiences and low income groups. In the UK commercial broadcasters and the BBC may now feel that community broadcasters will serve small communities of interest or isolated geographic communities and audiences with a low disposable income. This may lead to further exclusion of minority groups from mainstream broadcasting.

Furthermore if a community station is unsuccessful in commanding any kind of audience for its programming, commercial aspirants may argue that the frequency would be better

as a commercial licence. If the community station commands a high audience, the commercial stations can argue that it is actually operating as a commercial station and therefore the licence should be offered as such.

It is clear the discussion of programme content seems insuperable in its disparity. However the variety and diversity of content may be viewed as the strongest element of community radio. Radio has been heavily regulated since the early twentieth century and the development of general programme content has largely been the subject of centralised decision making. Community radio is still regulated and the applicants and licensees are under regulatory and legal obligations but the programme content is much more open to experimentation and finding a style that accommodates the broadcasters and listeners associated with each station. There need not be one pattern or model of community radio. One size will not fit all. The most striking observation made of the Australian stations was the great variety of programme content and styles of station, which has developed and now exists as a vibrant platform for many differing audiences. The UK stations currently on air are also very diverse and this needs to be protected and celebrated.

Funding
Central to the management of all the community stations in both the UK and Australia is how they are funded. It was found that there was a symbiotic relationship between methods of funding and the ethos of the station. The organisers and volunteers needed to feel comfortable with the methods of raising money for the station for it to work satisfactorily. Many stations have very small turnovers and exist on small budgets but the cost of premises, transmitters, technical areas and copyrights still need to be covered. Common sources of funding in both countries are various grants or payments from government or other agencies; payments for activities such as training; commercial advertising or sponsorship; commercial activities and listener subscription. In the UK, due to the obligation to provide 'social gain', the stations frequently look towards social funding for resources. The Australian stations do not have the same requirement, although many seek to provide what can be termed 'social gain' to their audiences and also benefit from social funding for this.

In Australia community stations may obtain funding by commercial sponsorship, although not spot advertising. This is to ameliorate the effect of a community station possibly taking advertising from a local commercial station. In the UK and Australia community stations pay relatively low broadcast costs, whereas a commercial licensee will pay a considerable sum for their licence and copyrights, the cost dependant on their potential audience. This means that commercial licensees feel that they are due some protection from a community station encroaching on their advertising market and target audience.

The consequence of this is that local Australian businesses can say, 'Gordon's Garage is pleased to sponsor our local community station', but cannot say, ' If you are looking for a new car, go to Gordon's garage'. This seems to be a very fine point and one that did not seem to deter a number of small to medium businesses providing sponsorship for the stations, in particular in the metropolitan and suburban areas. The further the stations got from centres of population the lower their income from commercial sources. The Australian community stations are limited to five minutes of commercial sponsorship announcements in any hour. The UK stations may take direct advertising, but no more that 50 percent of their total funding can come from this or any other single source. In

fact research showed that amongst the UK stations only a few were making very much of their income this way. The exception being Desi Radio in Southall, a Punjabi station that is extremely well supported by its community and is drawing on small to medium businesses for funding from advertising and also gaining in-kind support, for example when the station premises were being refurbished. They are limiting spot advertising due to the 50 percent rule and also are aware of the competition they pose to a relatively local Asian commercial station, Sunrise Radio. A similar situation occurred in Australia to Groove a youth station in Perth, who having only been on air for just over a year gained audience and commercial support to the extent that a local commercial station felt threatened.

Generally the Australian urban and metropolitan stations are relatively successful in finding sources of commercial funding. In addition they also benefit from higher listener subscription numbers than the more suburban and rural stations. Listener subscriptions come in two ways. Some listeners are members of the station and may vote at the annual general meetings for the board of directors. Members pay a subscription of between around A$50-100 a year, about £20-40. Other listeners respond to 'Radiothons', where the station actively fund raises on air usually for a week. Listeners are encouraged to phone up and give financial support to the station. Again for some stations this is very successful. For example 3RRR in Melbourne, a city of around three million, the manager, Kath Letch (15th July 2005) confirmed that listener subscriptions provide 55 percent of their turnover of A$1.2million, about £500,000, with 40 percent coming from commercial sponsorship and just five percent from other sources. However in areas of lower population or a lower income this type of financial support is less successful and less reliable.

In the UK only one station appears to have successfully used listener subscriptions so far. Cross Rhythms is a Christian station in Stoke on Trent. It has a scheme called 'The Friends of Cross Rhythms', in which each 'friend' pays £10 per month (about AUD$25) to the station. Jonathan Bellamy (22nd June 2005), the station manager, felt that part of the success of this scheme was due to the religious ethos of the station and the Christian belief in regular donations to charity and church. However many community stations have very vociferous and enthusiastic listeners who might be prepared to pay a small subscription to keep the station financially stable.

Both Cross Rhythms and the Brisbane Christian station, Family 96.5, (Pollard, 4th August) reported that they benefited from advertisers who appreciated their ethical stance. Companies wished to be associated with the stations because of the standards they promoted. They also both reported that on occasions they had refused advertising, sponsorship and in-kind promotion, which they felt did not concur with the values of the stations. It was noted that both of these stations were financially stable. An oddity of the UK case is that some stations have been barred from taking commercial sponsorship or advertising due to the proximity of a commercial station and others have been denied a licence entirely as it was felt that they would provide too much competition for the local commercial station (Ofcom, 2004).

In the UK and Australia many community stations are reliant wholly or in part on public funds. These come from a number of differing pots. Since the UK stations all have the criterion that they must show 'social gain' as part of their licence specification, a number qualify for various forms of social funding including European Social Funding, the government's 'New Deal' funds, or local authority schemes. The downside of this is that

this type of funding is time consuming to apply for and has many qualifications that have to be met. The funders require evaluation and feedback and some stations report that they are considering employing a fulltime worker to do this work. Indeed Takeover Radio, a children's station in Leicester, did just this and on the second visit in June 2005 it was found that they had employed a fulltime trust manager to run Takeover Trust, a charity linked to the station. The manager applies for suitable funds and is responsible for ensuring that the terms are adhered to and evaluation completed (Coley, 24th June 2005).

The Australian stations also benefit from social funding, the extent varying considerably with the station. The Community Broadcasting Foundation, based in Melbourne manages and allocates government funds for community radio and TV. The Foundation was set up in 1984 and the stations reported that they preferred dealing with the CBF rather than with a government funding agency. They felt that the CBF was basically 'on their side' and managed the available funds as fairly as possible. In particular there is funding for groups perceived as having extra needs, for example 'ethnic' groups, who are the newer migrant populations, many from south east Asia and eastern Europe and also the indigenous Aboriginal communities, who are often in remote or more isolated areas of the country. These funds may support a whole station or may be used to buy time on an existing station, which provide other services for other groups as well. For example Bumma Bippera, an indigenous station in Cairns started as a section of broadcasting on Cairns FM, the local general community station, but having gained support and volunteers was able to successfully apply for a separate licence. Although Cairns FM was pleased that they had launched a sister community station, they were financially worse off as they then lost the government funding that went with the indigenous broadcasting (Briet, 22nd July 2005).

The Australian Radio for the Print Handicapped (RPH) stations, which provide a reading service for listeners who find it difficult to access printed material, also obtain funds from organisations which publish material and are obliged to provide other means of accessing the information. These organisations, which are frequently part of central or local government. In the UK one station so far is seeking to provide a service for those with visual impairment. VIPOnAir in Glasgow is funded by the local council and four charities.

A number of stations both in Australia and in the UK were affiliated to training agencies or courses and benefit from fees paid for these usually by an outside agency. Radio Regen and BCB in the UK undertake considerable training and see this as a distinct part of their community function. Takeover Radio also provides training for young people and receives funding to enable it to do this (Everitt 2003b: 47-72).

As research progressed in the UK it became evident that there is a belief from some that community radio has a right to be publicly funded by some method or other. The Department of Media Culture and Sport have set up a small annual community radio fund of about £500,000, but this is unlikely to provide little more than seed funding for stations. Other funding models that have been suggested are allocating a small per cent of the TV licence fee to a community radio fund or similarly a small top-slice of commercial broadcast advertising revenue. At the present time neither of these funding sources seems likely to materialise. The feeling that community radio should be centrally funded would seem to grow from the obligation it has in the UK to show 'social gain'. Clearly if community radio is being tasked with solving or at least tackling some of

society's ills then why should it not access some of the funds allocated for this? However it could also be suggested that it will not do community radio any favours to be seen as a branch of the social services. From the earliest developments of community radio in South America, Europe and currently in Australia, community stations have enjoyed independence from governmental interference. They have given esteem and worth to marginalised communities and voices to under-represented groups, however financial dependence on national or international authorities may simply bring new forms of patriarchy and exclusion.

'Ownership' and organisational structures

> '…for example we have programmes dealing with domestic violence. In this area it has been shown that about half the men believe that it is OK to hit their wife'.
> 'How many male volunteers do you have?'
> 'Around 50'
> 'So you have probably about 25 male volunteers who think that domestic violence is acceptable?'
> 'I hadn't thought of that!'

There is a fundamental belief that individuals involved in community radio are generally nice people and instances where broadcast volunteers, staff or listeners have behaved antisocially, unethically or illegally are treated with shock and horror. Fortunately cases of this sort are rare, however during the course of research examples of embezzlement, theft, vandalism, xenophobia and hostile takeover bids were reported. Clearly the organisational structures of community stations need to be sound to prevent problems, particularly as it is difficult to 'sack' a volunteer. Even less easy to deal with are cases where unethical behaviour is core to the management of the station. For example where key individuals are spending more time than is reasonable running the station, in one instance, up to 130 hours a week.

Central to the principles of community radio is the notion that the audience and volunteer broadcasters, in other words the community being served by the station, have some ownership either literal or functional of the station. They need to feel that they have an influence over the station in its running, management and broadcast content.

If a community sees a need for a station to be essentially unifying and consolidating of the area then what will arise will be a station for a geographic area. However if a group within that area feels that they can use a station to define and give empowerment and respect to a particular section of the population then what will arise will be a community of interest station. These models are mutually exclusive and conflicts may arise. The original pilot stations in the UK deliberately represented differing models of organisation. In addition several of the stations were part of a larger umbrella organisation that had existed prior to the pilot. Two of the UK stations offer particularly interesting models, which may be helpful as the sector develops and expands.

FoD serves a small but distinct area of the Forest of Dean in southwest England. It is a rural area of undulating forested countryside. The population is scattered but does centre around five small towns or villages. The total population for the area is around 80,000. The station is on AM and has a network of AM transmitters and studios, which can broadcast independently or to the whole area from the villages. In Australia the indigenous and the remote broadcasters have a similar although larger model. These community radio sectors operated small stations often in rural areas, but they are able to

subscribe to a central satellite services, the Community Radio Network, (ComRadSat) or the National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS).

A second UK model is Sound Radio, which is based in a culturally diverse but rundown area of east London. The station is also on AM and is using what may be called the radio publishing house model. The station facilitates the use of the radio studio, equipment and frequency to local groups who come in to broadcast to their own community of interest audience. The station also has generic programming with a wider appeal. This model was common amongst the Australian stations, in particular the ethnic stations such as Perth's 6EBA. However the general and specialised stations also allocated time for broadcasting by particular ethnic groups who approach them. Where the Australian and UK stations differ is that in Australia the stations effectively sell the space to the community group who then sell the sponsorship. This is due to the government funding that stations receive for ethnic broadcasting.

What the UK pilot made clear was that no one model is the 'right' one. A community station needs to reflect the population it is serving and within that reflection there may be conflicts of interest. Community stations do not have the protection of being 'purchased'. It only needs a group of individuals to take part in the station and gradually take over the running. Indeed this may be desirable over time, otherwise the station may become static and unrepresentative of its community, which itself may change. The basic organisation of the station management needs to allow for change and yet pre-empt radical disruption.

During the UK licensing application process the regulator Ofcom advised stations that becoming a company limited by guarantee would be a wise and preferred model for 'ownership'. This means that stations have a managing board and a membership who can vote for the board. It was found that this was a common model in Australia. However even this can cause problems as one station discovered when it was subjected to a hostile takeover from another group of people who simply felt that they wanted to run the station their way. Some Australian stations have the requirement that only a certain number of board members are up for election or re-election at any one time and their terms of reference include this proviso. It would be wise for UK stations to examine these terms.

A common model found in Australia, was of community stations that were part of a university. These are amongst the earliest stations licensed, they still exist and are still being licensed. Some of the oldest stations in Australia are Radio Adelaide, Melbourne's 3RRR, Perth's Curtin FM, and Sydney's 2SER. They are all university stations and benefit from being part of a larger organisation that supports them financially either directly or by providing premises and facilities. The Universities also had members on the board of management and some say in the running of the station. None of the stations reported this as being particularly problematic, although there were reports that historically the relationships between the university and station had needed clarifying on occasions. In the UK one of the pilot stations GTFM in Pontypridd, was originally set up as a partnership between the University of Glamorgan and the Glyn Taff Community Centre. As Everitt (2003: 120: 2003b: 19) notes the partnership was uneven in terms of the size of the institutions and the expected outcomes. It was found necessary to renegotiate the relationship. Since then, the University of Lincoln has received a community radio licence for 'Siren'. This station has been running previously part-time online and with an

annual one month temporary licence, but plans to become a full-time community station in February 2007 (Rudd, 28th June 2006).

The audience
Audience figures are a sensitive issue amongst community radio practitioners. Some feel that the size of the audience for a community station is irrelevant. They feel that the clear social gain to a large number of volunteers is of greater importance than the number of listeners. There is also an opinion that even if the 'audience' is one listener who places a very high value on the service, it is appropriate for a community broadcaster to broadcast for them. Some may question that if the audience is 'large', the station is beginning to behave like a commercial broadcaster and thus risks the loss of their community broadcasting status.

On the other hand it is also felt that radio broadcasting, by its very nature, is a point to multipoint medium and therefore should command an audience. If community radio is to demonstrate that it is of value to the community served, some of them need to be listening.

Due to the mature nature of Australian community radio there is data concerning audiences, although some of this is very general. However a recent detailed piece of audience research carried out by McNair Ingenuity (2004) showed that 45 percent of the population listen to a community station at some point each month. In Australia it is accepted that listeners change radio stations during the day or week depending on personal interest, or other broadcast content. Individual Australian stations that have done research or taken part in audience research reported that they have a 10 percent weekly audience share. For example the station manager of 3RRR, Kath Letch, (15th July 2005) reported an audience of 322,000 weekly listeners representing 10.3 percent of the Melbourne total population.

In the UK it was noticed that there was sometimes reluctance for stations to conduct even very simple research for their own stations. Although the professed reasons for not doing any audience research was often that it was 'too expensive', 'too difficult', 'there is no time to do it', it was observed that this may have indicated a lack of confidence that the station had a listening audience.

However the stations sampled usually did keep a log of walk-in contacts, phone calls, emails, SMS texts and letters. When these less formal audience indicators were investigated it could be suggested that the UK community stations do have an active and enthusiastic audience. Those stations which were broadcasting online had a record of the website hits. For some this indicated an audience well out of their broadcast area. For example Cross Rhythms have about 70,000 hits a month online. The manager, Jonathan Bellamy felt that this could be explained by their unusual, very contemporary, Christian musical genre, which has an appeal beyond the local Christian community. However he was also curious as to what their online listeners in the United States, for example, got out of reports and promotions for a church jumble sale in Newcastle-under-Lyme, a small town in the English midlands.

All the Australian stations recognised the need to have an understanding of their audience share, although they recognised that this was not a complete indication of 'success'. They also recognised that the audience would listen to some programming and not others and felt that this was entirely appropriate for a community station, since they

were frequently broadcasting to smaller niche communities within their over arching one. The youth music stations that were visited SYN in Melbourne, FBI in Sydney, and Groove in Perth, were all in urban areas and felt they had a strong and defined audience and that because of this appropriate local sponsors would be interested in supporting them financially on commercial terms. They did not feel that this conflicted with their community radio status. All three managers felt that they were providing for a community that was not catered for elsewhere on the broadcast spectrum (Ives, 14th July 2005; Buchanan, 11th August 2005, Royce, 15th August).

Staff and volunteers
For community radio there is a strong link between the audience and the broadcasters, as the latter will usually come from the community audience. By definition community radio primarily uses volunteer broadcasters, who reflect the community that the station is for. It is relatively straight forwards to demonstrate 'social gain' for these volunteers in terms of acquired skills, self-esteem and pleasure. A measurement of 'success' for the station may be regarded as its ability to attract a large volunteer base. For the UK stations, who must show 'social gain' it is much easier to show that they have a high number of trained volunteers, who have increased their personal self-esteem, than to demonstrate that a listener who has never made contact with the station has gained anything from the on air broadcasts.

The fulltime stations in the UK and Australia, typically said that they had around 100-150 regular volunteers. This figure would seem to represent the number that a fulltime community station can reasonably manage within a broadcast week. There are variations to this. At SYIN the aim is to have a regular through-put of volunteers. They change their 'grid' or broadcast schedule every 12 weeks and have a totally new group of 150 young volunteer broadcasters, so using around 600 volunteers in a year. The general manager, Bryce Ives (14th July, 2005), regards training these volunteers and giving them airtime as a core function of the station.

Usually the volunteers come from the community being served on air, the exception being the Australian RPH stations. These offer a daily newspaper reading service to their audience, who may have a visual impairment, literacy difficulties or have English as a second language. They audition their volunteers for clarity of speech and reading ability, by definition their target audience will not be broadcasters although they may take part in the station in other ways (Luckett, 17th August 2005). However VIP in Glasgow, a similar station which also caters for those with a visual impairment, encourages visually impaired volunteers and staff (Kirk, 30th November 2005).

The UK Access pilot stations found the recruitment, training and organisation of the volunteers was in itself a major job and by the second visit several had developed the role of 'volunteer co-ordinator'. Amongst the Australian stations this was a common function. This was found to be a skilled job, requiring broadcasting expertise, teaching skills and considerable tact. Popular urban stations had to decide whether volunteers could remain as broadcasters indefinitely or should be rotated and given a 'lifespan' to allow space for others to get involved.

The balance between the use of paid staff and volunteers is one that all the community stations had had to consider. Obviously this matter also links to the stations' financial situation. When the UK Access pilot stations were first visited there were very few paid staff and those there were often had another role, such as running the community centre

or project of which the station had become a part. A daily community station is demanding in terms of time and energy for those involved. There is a tendency for one or two key individuals to take responsibility for a community stations' management. Paid staff are an expense but enable the station to run smoothly. In his report of the Access pilot scheme, Everitt (2003: 48) identified the role of the 'charismatic individual' who really drove the station's development and licence application. This was identified as a key function in the early months of a community station's licence, both in the UK and Australian sample.

The early UK research noted high levels of exhaustion amongst paid staff and key volunteers. Their workload in some cases had led to the break up of relationships and families and in one case, hospitalisation. By the second visit the original Access pilot stations had generally better organised their core management into sustainable structures, often by employing fulltime or part-time staff. It was sad to observe that in some instances the workload on the community station had cost individuals their health or personal relationships and it seems inappropriate and unethical for a community station to give 'social gain' to some and cost others so dearly. Paid staff have legal and ethical employment rights, which should be respected.

Within the Australian sample stations the number of paid staff varied between none and fifteen. Typically amongst the stations there was at least a manager and an administrator, for example Sydney sub-metro station, Eastside. (Laird, 8th August 2005) However in the larger metro stations this rose considerably, to fifteen staff in the case of 3RRR in Melbourne. However across the whole sector 52 percent had no paid manager (Forde, Meadows and Foxwell, 2002: 29). This was particularly common in the smaller stations in areas of lower population such as Cairns FM (Briet, 22nd July 2005).

Australian stations commonly employed fundraisers. These varied between full-time or part-time paid staff to volunteers, sometimes with a marketing background. Their role was to market the stations with the aim of acquiring financial sponsorship and other sources of funding and in-kind support. This is an area that the UK stations might usefully explore further. It was also common for the larger Australian stations to pay the Breakfast presenter, as this is found to be an awkward programme for volunteers to cover and it was felt that it helped provide a consistency of output at a popular time of day for listeners.

Conclusion

Just a little research in the area of community radio shows that anybody with any kind of interest in radio knows exactly what community radio is. Ironically, almost everybody disagrees. Very strong views are held about community radio. There seems to be a general consensus that a community station is a radio station, run primarily by volunteers on a not-for-profit basis, but that seems to be where the agreement ends. Some believe it must broadcast to a delineated geographic area, some say it must be for a distinct group of listeners, others feel that the operation must remain 'small', in terms of audience reach, financial turnover or even floor space! Some believe it is a means to discuss under-represented issues or to educate the audience or the broadcasters or simply to provide unusual niche programming. Indeed the Australian research showed that after 30 years community radio might quite legitimately be all these things and the UK new community radio broadcasters should rejoice in the potential richness and diversity of community radio provision.

Australian community radio is a strong and vibrant sector of broadcasting, serving their various audiences and broadcasters well and in many ways. UK community broadcasters would find it encouraging and informative to examine how it has developed over the past thirty years. The strength of community radio in Australia is in its diversity of practice, the organisational models and the content it provides. The indication is that UK community broadcasters should not be concerned by diversity of practice, this is exactly what community radio does best. In particular it is clear in Australia that 'social gain' does not always imply addressing 'social need'. Community radio can bring pleasure and entertainment to its listeners as well as relevant information and community esteem. The balance and symbiotic relationship between the volunteer broadcasters and the audience is crucial and defining in community radio, but it must be remembered that it is a relationship, if the audience is ignored and only the needs of the volunteers considered, it is disputable if what is running is actually a radio station. In the UK, stations need to embed audience research into their daily running and recognise that it need not be arduous or expensive (Gordon 2006: 20-21).

After thirty years Australian community stations still find funding an ongoing and difficult concern. The research suggests that the UK stations may simply have to live with this fact. The stations that were the most financially stable had an income from a number of different sources. This also meant that the station would not become financially unviable if a source of funding dried up. Although a constant concern over funds and the exhausting work of forever being on the look out for new money is not beneficial, stations may also feel that it is right for the nature of community stations to not be in a 'comfort zone' financially. Social funding will follow perceived social needs in an area. Grants make stations examine the audience they are trying to reach and commercial support will indicate a local engagement.

As the UK stations go on air and lay down their ground rules for operation they need to consider models that are robust and clear. There needs to be flexibility to allow for change over time as the community itself changes and develops. But there also needs to be procedures in place to prevent radical swings of policy based on individual personalities.

Finally, practitioners and supporters need have no fears in examining community radio objectively, critically and shrewdly. Its non-professional, not-for profit status brings benefits, rights and responsibilities, which in the future, may need respecting and defending. However at present in both Australia and the UK, community radio is regarded as a worthwhile, energetic and vibrant part of the broadcasting sector.

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Jonathan Bellemy, Station Manager, Cross Rhythms, Stoke on Trent, 22nd June 2005.
Niels Briet, Station Manager, Cairns FM, 22nd July 2005.
Stuart Buchanan, Station Manager, FBI, Sydney 11th August 2005.
Graham Coley, Station Manager, Takeover, Leicester, 24th June 2005.
Bryce Ives, General Manager, Syn, Melbourne, 14th July 2005.
Nina Kirk, Production Coordinator, VIPonair, Glasgow, 30th November 2005.
Kath Letch, Station Manager, 3RRR, Melbourne, 15th July 2005.
Iain Laird, Station manger, Eastside Radio, Sydney 8th August 2005.
Peter Luckett, Chair, RPH, Information Madio, Perth, 17th August 2005.
Barry Melville, General Manager, CBAA, Sydney, 11th August 2005.
Nick Nikolich, Executive, 6EBA, Perth, 15th August 2005.
Malcolm Pollard, Station Manager, Family 96.5, Brisbane, 4th August 2005.
Bryan Rudd, Siren, University of Lincoln, UK, 28th June 2006.
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