

BBC Trust: Religious radio programmes are “least popular” and “least well received” – but we won’t change them

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A consultation on speech radio by the BBC Trust has found that religious programmes are the least liked and least well received radio shows, but stated that the BBC has no plans to change them.

The BBC Trust, the governing body of the BBC, has a "responsibility to get the best out of the BBC for licence fee payers" and conducts an ["in-depth review"](#) of each of the BBC's services."

In [research](#) which included a public consultation on speech radio, (stations like Radio 4, Radio 4 Extra and Radio 5 live), the BBC Trust found that "programmes on religion ... are the least popular offering from the station's programming in terms of claimed listening" with just 15% of Radio 4 listeners tuning in to religious programmes, compared with 91% who listen to "in-depth factual programmes".

In addition, programmes on religion are the "least well received" of all Radio 4 programmes, with "just under two thirds of Radio 4 listeners (63%) rating them as good."

Despite this finding, the report states that "Radio 4 is well aware of its listeners' range of views on this subject and has no plans for change to its output at present."

NSS campaigns manager Stephen Evans said "it is extraordinary that such a critical review could result in no action being taken. What was the purpose of conducting a public consultation and review, if the findings are to be ignored?"

The National Secular Society submitted a response to the consultation arguing that "the BBC devotes too many of its resources to the provision of exclusively religious programming, particularly when research has shown that very few people listen to it."

Mr Evans said that the central assertion of the NSS submission has now been "confirmed by the BBC Trust's own research."

The NSS also took the opportunity to raise our objections to the current model of *Thought for the Day*, and suggested that the programme be "reformed to incorporate nonreligious voices."

The BBC Trust sidestepped this issue by stating that Radio 4 "already brings contributors from different faiths to *Thought for the Day*", not addressing the suggestion about the programme featuring nonreligious contributors.

Additionally, the review said that "several respondents call for the secularisation" of *Thought for the Day*, "although a substantial number of listeners maintain that religion does have a place on the programme."

Mr Evans added, "To have a slot in the middle Radio 4's flagship news and current affairs programme, reserved only for religious speakers, to make sometimes very contentious points

which go completely unchallenged, is unjustifiable. It demonstrates an unhealthy and anachronistic deference to religion unworthy of Britain's public-service broadcaster."

The NSS recently [raised concerns](#) that religious programmes are effectively 'off-limits' from criticism.

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Thought for the Day should include nonreligious contributions – or be scrapped.

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