

# **Neighbours: The Omnibus Study**

## **Foreword**

Many times in my life I've had people mutter the same thing to me – “Why is there no Neighbours omnibus?” I have always strived to answer this question in a democratic way, but have always failed; ebbing on the cusp of insanity to actually present a legitimate, well-founded justification as to why there is no omnibus of what may very well be the greatest show in existence.

I decided to have a cursory look on the BBC website and eventually found their ‘reason’ for not broadcasting a Neighbours omnibus. It reads:

“There isn't room in the schedule to show all 5 episodes at once. Neighbours is already shown twice a day 5 times a week which is more than most shows. Available spaces in the schedule have to be allocated fairly to allow room for a range of programmes.”

I decided that this was not a sufficient line of reasoning to deprive us of said omnibus, and decided to do two things:

- Dissect this argument piece-by-piece and show it for what it really is - illogical, unsound, and most of all, unacceptable.
- Delve deep into the dark world of broadcasting in order to understand the logistics in broadcasting an omnibus, and eventually procure satisfactory evidence to make the BBC give us the omnibus we've wanted for so long.

This report takes the form of this foreword, the examination (a fact disseminating section), my counter-argument and finally my conclusion.

At no point in this report do I discuss and describe Neighbours to you, the reader. I am simply assuming that if you are reading this, you know what Neighbours is, as without that knowledge, not many people would be interested in even taking a passing glance at this report. For those who are curious though, and do want to find out more, please visit the official Neighbours website<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.neighbours.com>

## **Examination**

In this section of the report, I propose to find cold, hard facts. It is the prequel to my counter-argument which comes later, as once the facts are found, analysed and, more importantly, mapped into various graphical representations, I shall be capable of producing a coherent and articulate response.

So what are these facts I need to delve into the dark nadir of broadcasting in order to reveal? My proposal is to uncover the facts relating to digital and terrestrial viewing figures, demographics, current schedules and cost. It is my belief that these facts, when combined, will facilitate me to make a reasoned, lucid contention.

This is a considerable amount of information to gather, so to narrow it down I shall concentrate my studies on what I am assuming to be the three main BBC channels, of which if there were to be a Neighbours omnibus, it would be shown on – BBC One, BBC Two and BBC Three, the latter being a purely free-view digital channel.

Of these, BBC One and Two are airing 24 hours a day 7 days a week, and BBC Three for 10.5 hours every day of the week – between the hours of 7pm and 5:30am.<sup>2</sup>

### **BBC One**

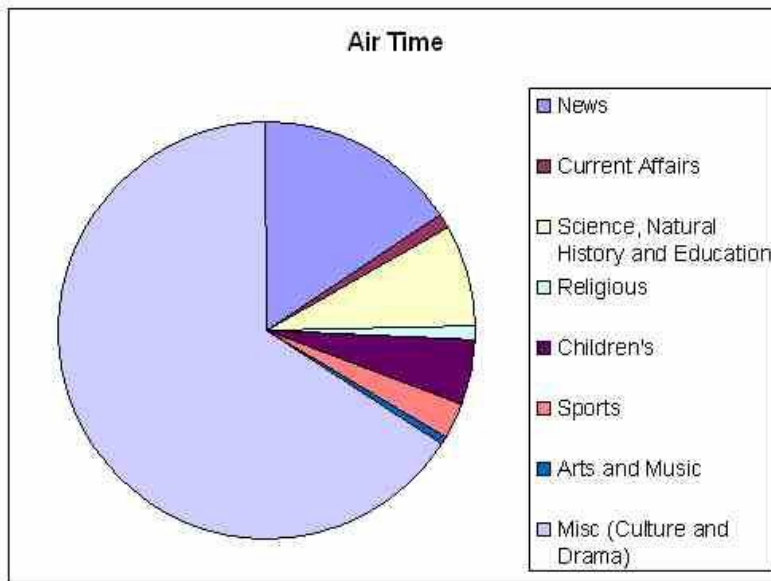
As mentioned previously, BBC One broadcasts continuously. This means that for 168 hours (10,080 minutes) a week shows are aired on BBC One. These shows are of a very varied appeal and the channel is the most popular of the three in question by quite a length. BBC describes its flagship channel as “the UK’s most valued television channel, with the broadest range of quality programmes of any UK mainstream network.”<sup>3</sup>

According to the BBC Statement of Programme Policy for 2005/2006, BBC One aims weekly to air: 1,600 minutes of news coverage; 100 minutes of current affairs programming; 800 minutes of science, natural history and education shows; 100 minutes of religious programmes; 500 minutes of children’s shows; 300 minutes of sports related programmes; 50 minutes of arts and music; with the rest given to various shows of a cultural and dramatic nature (6,630 minutes). Want a graph? Following is a pie chart.

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<sup>2</sup> British Broadcasting Corporations full television listings. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/tv/> Accessed March 21<sup>st</sup> 2006. [All data regarding the length of programming and the current schedule is taken from this site.]

<sup>3</sup> BBC Statement of Programme Policy 2005/2006 Television Report. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/info/statements2005/pdfs/television.pdf> Accessed March 22nd 2006.



**Fig 1 – BBC One Weekly Air Time Dissection**

By studying the current schedule, this all appears to be going to plan, but with one vociferous miscalculation. Currently the 1,600 proposed minutes of news coverage is quite a lot higher than this... by 1,000 minutes. “How has this happened?” I hear the masses cry. Well, nightly after all the allotted shows have been aired, a feed from the BBC digital channel ‘BBC News 24’ is shown until broadcasting commences again at 6am. This explains the anomalous 1,000 extra minutes of news coverage. To put this into perspective, the above graph would have a quarter rather than an eighth for news, and the miscellaneous category would only take up half the chart. Shocking!

This extra 1,000 minutes of carbon copied news from BBC News 24 is no measly amount – without this, a multitude of shows can be aired, thus enhancing BBC One’s ‘broad range of quality programmes’. Also, I’m sure a small Neighbours omnibus could fit in there - it would only take exactly 10% of it’s time. And if that isn’t classed as a quality programme, I don’t know what is.

How did I get this magic 10%? As you may also know, BBC One is the channel where Neighbours is aired twice daily Monday to Friday. Each episode takes a 25 minute slot which equates to 50 minutes daily for the dual showing – 250 minutes a week of which 125 minutes is original, unrepeated joy. An omnibus though, would not require such a time. These 125 minutes can be reduced by eradicating opening scenes, credits and recaps of previous episodes which would simply not be required when showing all of the episodes in a row.

I did some very laborious research, watching many episodes of neighbours to try and create an ideal and efficient omnibus time length. In one week (20<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> March 2006) the average length of one episode’s constituent parts worked out as: 33 seconds for previous episode recapping (repeated footage); 23 seconds for the opening sequence; 1163 seconds (19 minutes 23 seconds) for actual original episode footage; 35 seconds for closing credits. The more observant readers may notice that this doesn’t add up to make 25 minutes – the allotted time slot for an episode of neighbours. This is because the extra minutes are made up by adverts for other shows and ethnically diverse dancing clips that are often shown on BBC One between programmes.

From this information we can work out the most time efficient method of showing an omnibus. One set of previous episode recaps would be required, shown from the last episode of the previous week (33 seconds), one set of opening credits (23 seconds), five stripped-down episodes (5815 seconds – 96 minutes, 55 seconds) and finally a set of ending credits.

The inherent problem for this calculation lies in the ending credits – these would change with an omnibus. Currently the credits only list the characters and staff who participated in that episode, so for an omnibus they would be longer. To come up with a reasonable set of omnibus credits, one would have to study the credits for names on one set that weren't on the others, and use some crazy mathematical formula to find the rolling speed of each credit and use this to find an estimated time for an extended set. Such an equation may be:

$$\text{Average Speed} = \text{Distance Travelled} / \text{Time Taken}$$

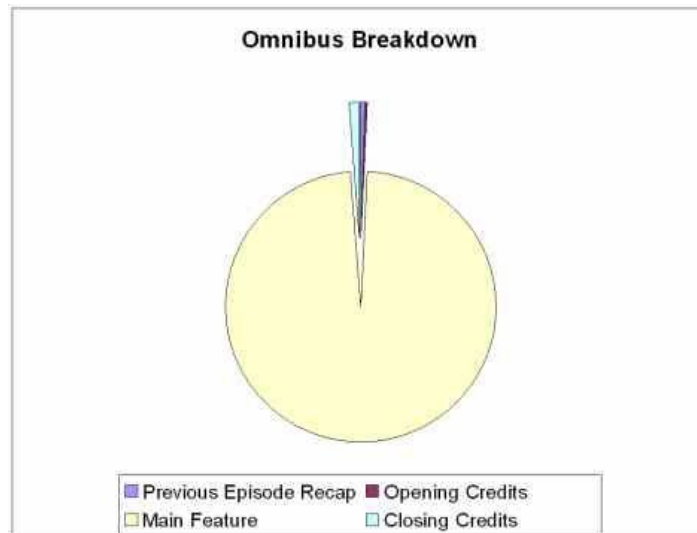
For this, one would obviously need a ruler, a timing mechanism of some sort and a degree in Advanced Number Theory which would allow one to do such a division. Whilst I do possess a ruler and a time-keeping device that can be used as a crude time monitor, I only have an A-Level in Mathematics and a Bachelors degree in Computer Science. There is no possible way I could work out such an equation<sup>4</sup>. Instead we will have to settle for a different approach... conjecturing! I say that an extended version of credits could be anywhere between 50 and 60 seconds. In Australia, the average closing credits length is 72 seconds<sup>5</sup>; maybe we should adopt this for good measure. It also features an extended theme which is incontestably a veiled bonus.

With all these principal components combined, a full length omnibus would measure in at 5943 seconds, or 99 minutes and 3 seconds – 1 hour, 39 minutes 3 seconds. A 100 minute time slot would be perfect for this, as it would enable an extra 57 seconds of mindless chatter and inane jokes to be made by the person who introduces the next programme, or a clip of ethnically diverse dancing. Bonus! Following is a graphical representation of this fictional Neighbours omnibus:

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<sup>4</sup> If anyone would like the exact running time of these conjured extended credits please do get in contact and I shall endeavour to produce an accurate length using the aforementioned equation.

<sup>5</sup> Neighbours: The Perfect Blend. <http://www.perfectblend-media.co.uk/credits.htm> Accessed 22nd March 2006.



**Fig 2 – Fictional Neighbours Omnibus Breakdown**

So by simply taking a 10% reduction in the amount of time that a copy of BBC News 24's footage is shown on BBC One, there would be space for a showing of a Neighbours omnibus. This would also have far-reaching implications – the BBC would be closer to its target of 1600 minutes of weekly news coverage, and many, many people will be a lot happier, leading to less violence and in the long run, world peace.

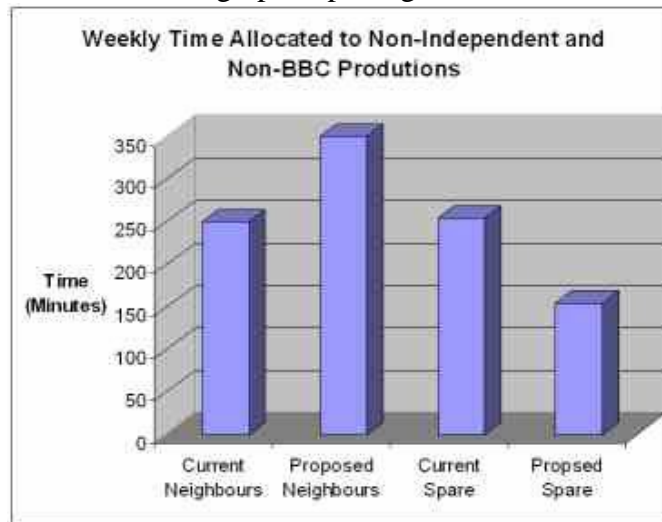
Although, how will this change in policy affect the pie chart we saw earlier? Well, the 'News' section will still be relatively large, taking up just under a quarter of the whole area, and the 'Religion' segment will grow twice in size.

Hold on a second. How is this possible? Surely Neighbours would be classed under the programme group 'Religion', yet if this is so it should already be more than twice its current size (due to the current 250 weekly minutes of Neighbours currently shown). This confuses and saddens me. It is appalling that such a firm can make such a mistake by not classifying Neighbours correctly. Regardless, life goes on.

I shall have to postulate that it is classed under the 'Culture and Drama' heading, although I'm not sure which one exactly they believe it to be. 'Culture' possibly due to the shows Australian heritage or 'Drama' because it is a drama. Despite this disconcerting discovery – nothing else needs to be said regarding this as the change to the segments would be minimal. An omnibus showing will take up a 1.508% share in 'Culture and Drama's existing monopoly of the available broadcast time. This would mean Neighbours would be shown for a total of 350 minutes weekly – a 5.279% share of the allotted time for this category of show.

There is another issue one must include in this discussion at this point. According to the BBC, again from the BBC Statement of Programme Policy for 2005/2006, the BBC has a commitment to have 70% of its BBC One output BBC commissioned, with a further 25% being commissioned by external, independent producers. This leaves a measly 5% for programmes made by production companies not affiliated by the BBC who are also not independent – this is where Grundy, the production company for Neighbours would fit.

This 5% equates to 504 minutes a week. Neighbours already takes up 250 minutes of this amount, and an extra 100 minutes for an omnibus would leave only 154 minutes a week for the BBC to use external, non-independent produced programmes. This could cause a problem. Here's a graph depicting this datum:



**Fig 3 – Comparison between Existing and Proposed Neighbours and its Effect on Time Available for Non-Independent, Non-BBC Productions**

## BBC Two

BBC Two is very different from its much loved older brother - BBC One. A quote from the BBC Statement of Programme Policy states that “BBC Two is a mixed-genre channel combining serious factual and specialist subjects with inventive comedy and distinctive drama to bring challenging, intelligent television to a wide audience”.

From the above, and by doing a quick browse of the average BBC Two weekly schedule, it is apparent that this branch of the report shall be terse. Currently, BBC Two shows original programming 24 hours a day. There may be repeats, but not on the same day and rarely in the same week.

With regards to the actual content of BBC Two, it consists of many cultural, educational and comedy related programmes and a variety of drama shows. The shows are wide in range and are of a consistent high quality.

As I stated above, as the channel is airing 24 hours a day with original, mostly non-repeated programmes, I would not suggest having an omnibus on this channel. BBC Two is a bit like BBC Radio Two – one of the more popular channels with quality broadcasting for the intellectual masses<sup>6</sup>. These people (the core demographic for BBC Two<sup>7</sup>) can unquestionably relate to the plight of the every day Neighbours fan, but would not want to see their beloved programmes cancelled or changed in order to show an omnibus. I would not expect this either, and as such would like to leave BBC Two the way it is.

<sup>6</sup> My assumption – no reference data available.

<sup>7</sup> Another assumption.

## **BBC Three**

Here's the BBC's own description of BBC Three, taken from its Statement of Programme Policy: BBC Three offers "an intelligent, ambitious mix of programmes which reflect the things that matter to young British adults. The channel is committed to a mixed schedule of news, current affairs, education, arts, science and coverage of international issues as well as to high-quality innovative drama, comedy and entertainment."

The description of this channel leads me to believe that BBC Three may be our greatest hope in terms of a potential home for a Neighbours omnibus. Let's recap on that last sentence: "...coverage of international issues as well as to high-quality innovative drama, comedy and entertainment." No argument is required here as it is a well known fact that Neighbours is Australian, thus covering the topic of 'international issues', and is without doubt a very innovative drama that is both entertaining and comedic at the same time. This programme hits all bases – a guaranteed winner, surely!

Let us investigate deeper into the depths of BBC Three. It does not broadcast any show between the hours of 5.30am and 7pm everyday of the week and even that's being generous – does anyone actually class "Welcome to BBC 3" as a program? Regardless, we shall in this case, just to give the BBC the benefit of the doubt, but for the record, this "programme" takes up 90 minutes of late night showing a day, which equates to 630 minutes a week - over 6 times the required length for a neighbours late-night omnibus.

It's probably a good idea not to argue against the 810 minutes that BBC Three is not broadcasting a day. I do not know how much money it costs to broadcast a digital channel per hour and to find out such information would take the research skills of a master inquisitor. All I know is, that to broadcast an extra 100 minutes to show an omnibus of a show already shown twice a day during the week may be asking a bit too much of the BBC. After all, this is public money we're spending. There would in all probability be outrage – fronted by the Daily Mail, no less – and as such most of the "upper"-middle class of Britain would automatically join in, start petrol strikes and panic buy tinned-goods from Sainsbury's. This doesn't mean all is lost with regards to BBC Three though. No, not at all.

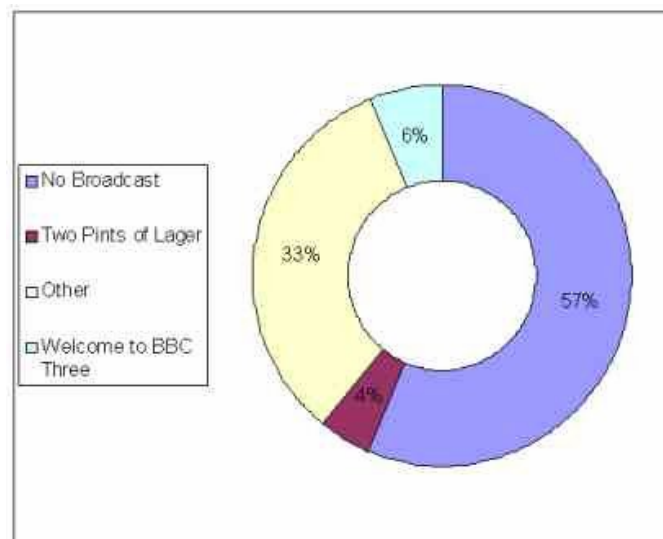
Regardless of this mass show of solidarity from Britain's middle-class, intent on saving every penny of the precious television licence fee, we need to be objective here and put this onus on ourselves. I (and undoubtedly the majority of the other 10,000,000+ daily Neighbours viewers) would be more than content for an extra penny (£0.01) to go onto the licensing fee exclusively to go towards an extra 100 minutes of broadcasting on BBC Three for an omnibus. Surely £100,000 is enough money to broadcast on a digital channel for an extra 100 minutes once a week? It could be shown between 5:20pm and the current scheduled start of programming at 7pm on a weekend – preferably on a Sunday. That would be ideal for all concerned, I'm positive.

This may only be a small argument though, and not worth pursuing, so let's take a look at the current BBC Three schedule to see if there's anything we can do. At this

point I'm going to temporarily change from the refined style of this report and digress into a rather ill-mannered dialogue I had with myself whilst researching this.

“Ah, now where's the Radio Times. Here it is, let me see... Digital... BBC Three – here we are. Hmm, it seems this new fangled ‘Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps’ is on four times a night, every night of the week. It must be one of those new popular comedy shows that are taking the country by storm. Kids of today – what are they like! Oh no, wait, I know. I think I recall now... is it that drivel that was on BBC Two a few years ago, but didn't get enough ratings, so they took it off air? Yes, I think it is. Hogwash! Claptrap! Look... there's even an old Neighbours cast member in there doing the sporadic appearance ordinarily in the vicinity of a neurotic, overanxious, exasperating woman he seems to be trying to infiltrate. What a legend. Poor Tad, he's gone downhill – at least there's one good thing about this show.”

Let us analyse: ‘Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps’ is on 4 times daily, Saturday to Tuesday inclusive, and twice on Fridays. This amounts to 18 episodes a week, each taking up a 30 minute slot which means it's almost certainly 25 minutes long. I may be under-compensating with the length, but that happens a lot. Anyway... 25 minutes an episode, 18 times a week makes 450 minutes a week in my book. Pardon? A graph? OK.



**Fig 4 – BBC Three Weekly Breakdown (Percentage of Total per Programme)**

More analysis? Let's look at the episodes... 44 episodes exist in the entire “Two Pints” back catalogue. This must mean that they show the entire library of this show every two and a half weeks. This does beg the question of how this show has been shown at this rate almost since BBC Three was launched in February 2003 – almost three full years at the time of writing. I've jumped the gun here though – on closer inspection, even though four episodes a day are shown, only two ‘original’ episodes and broadcast, then repeated anywhere between 2 hours 25 minutes and 3 hours later. That is 200 minutes of purely repeated episodes a week – the length of two full Neighbours omnibuses.

What's so good about this show that the BBC feel the need to broadcast it so often, and then repeat it?

BBC Three has had critical and popular successes, winning more awards in its three year history than most of its commercial rivals (Sky One, LIVINGtv, E4, ITV2, Five and Paramount Comedy Channel) have won in their combined 25-year history. In total BBC Three has won 6 BAFTA awards, 5 British Comedy Awards, 15 Royal Television Society Awards and 5 Rose d'Or Awards since the channel was launched. Most recently, it won Broadcast Magazine's Digital Channel of the Year Award for Best General Entertainment Channel, and MGEITF Non Terrestrial Channel of the Year.<sup>8</sup>

These awards were for comedy shows 'Little Britain', 'The Mighty Boosh', 'The Smoking Room', 'Nighty Night' and animation 'Monkey Dust'. All three of BBC Three's dramas produced in 2004 (Outlaws, Bodies and Conviction) received BAFTA nominations, as did classical music show Flashmob: The Opera. Parenting show Little Angels also won awards.

*'Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps' has never won an award.*

In fact, the BBC Comedy Guide<sup>9</sup> states of the show:

“Despite the prowess of a fine cast, the plots, situation and expletives-inclusive dialogue in this sex comedy were so base and substandard that any plus points were constantly undermined, for the relentless concentration on below-the-belt antics, allied to the mostly witless sexual banter, resulted in a distinctly juvenile end-product that wasn't so much shocking as shockingly bad.”

With regards to this programme and BBC Three as a whole: I feel I can safely rest my case here.

## **World-Wide Appeal**

Neighbours has been, and still is, a rather British institution. Having originally being aired on the Seven Network in Australia in 1985, it was cancelled within its first year. The series was immediately picked-up by rival Network Ten, who had an eye for a bargain and knew good shows when they saw them. Network Ten began screening in early 1986 and ever since it has remained popular, regularly sneaking into the top ten watched programmes in all of Australia. The show was created by Reg Watson and is produced by the Reg Grundy Organisation.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Wikipedia's BBC Three information page. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BBC3> Accessed 24<sup>th</sup> March 2006

<sup>9</sup> BBC Comedy Guide. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/guide> Accessed 24<sup>th</sup> March 2006

<sup>10</sup> This information, and most of the other data quoted in this section has been drawn from the previously mentioned Wikipedia encyclopaedia pages relating to the Neighbours soap opera, available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neighbours>. Accessed between 20<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> March 2006. Whilst this site is of an 'open source' nature, and as such all data can be edited by any visitor to the site, I have checked and verified the relevant facts by using the given links on the page in question.

Back here in the United Kingdom, it was initially broadcast in 1986 when BBC One began screening the show in its regular lunchtime slot. It quickly gained a cult following, and was once blamed for causing a downturn in early afternoon school lessons. This caused the show to be moved to a slightly earlier time slot, in which it has stayed ever since.

The show was soon given another slot for an early afternoon repeat showing after Michael Grade – the BBC Controller – took such advice off his daughter. We have a lot to thank this girl for. During the show's peak seasons in the late 1980s, the UK audience regularly peaked into the tens of millions - watched by more people than the entire population of Australia. The episodes in the UK are now generally shown between one and three months after they are seen in Australia, as the BBC often removes the show from its schedule during major sports tournaments. This is done, not due to lack of ratings or unpopular time slots, but to take into account the fact that the show usually takes a four-week break over the Christmas/New Year period in Australia for the Southern Hemisphere summer.

The show has also been sold to networks in many other countries around the world. Episodes from 1999 were aired for a six-week trial basis on the American channel Oxygen in March of 2004. At first, it was shown in the afternoon opposite higher-rated American soaps such as 'The Young and the Restless' and 'All My Children', which gave the show anaemic ratings from the first airing; the people who would be most interested in the show, were watching other, more established serials. After a couple of weeks, the show moved to a late-night time slot and eventually left the air entirely.

It has been long aired by Television New Zealand and screens twice daily at 5:05am and 5:30pm and also airs every evening on Irish TV station RTE Two at 5.30. These episodes are also about three months behind the Australian network.

As you can see, Neighbours truly is one of the few globally popular soap operas. Starring in an episode is almost a rite-of-passage for aspiring Australian actors and singers who wish to make an impact the world over.

### **Luminary Figures**

Neighbours isn't just a soap opera though – it has given the world much, much more than a simple 25 minutes of daily entertainment. Many successful Australian actors and singers have started their careers by working on Neighbours. Such household names include Kylie Minogue, Jesse Spencer, Guy Pearce, Natalie Imbruglia, Jason Donovan, Holly Valance, Mark Little, Radha Mitchell, Delta Goodrem and Natalie Bassingthwaite.

Actor Alan Dale who had previously starred in 'The Young Doctors', played the central character of Jim Robinson for the show's first seven years and is now a recognisable star in many US series such as 24 and 'The OC'.

Russell Crowe has also appeared on the show by having a brief appearance as an extra... which is a pity.

One of the most enduring and popular characters to have ever graced the show is Harold Bishop, who can still be seen on the show today. Played by actor Ian Smith, Harold Bishop was brought back into the show after a lengthy departure and his return prompted critical acclaim. Ian Smith has also written many of the scripts for the show and makes many public appearances promoting the show after all these years.

Another popular character that cannot go unmentioned is Karl “The Good Doctor” Kennedy, played by the inspired virtuoso, Alan Fletcher. Having been in the show for many years, Alan has been a central character in many of the biggest story lines to date and is continuously praised by fans. Alan Fletcher cannot be mentioned solely for his Neighbours handiwork though – he is also an accomplished musician who has embarked on many international tours, of which almost every venue has been a sell-out. Whilst I am not denying Alan Fletcher of his obvious musical talents (I highly recommend visiting his personal website where you can listen to some songs and find more information regarding upcoming dates<sup>11</sup>), it cannot be ignored that his success as a musician has spawned from his Neighbours appearances. This is evident when attending a performance, as the attendees also happen to be those of the Neighbours core demographic.

These icons also appear in many pantomimes across Britain, which is undoubtedly a very British custom. These actors, when they visit this country to act in these pantomimes almost every year, always manage to pull great crowds to the shows as the draw of seeing these great stars of our generation in person is truly amazing. Without them, the pantomime would not be what it is today.

It’s not just Neighbours and pantomimes either. Neighbours cast members have given critically acclaimed enjoyment to people the world-over, such that nobody can deny the pivotal role this show has played in making the entertainment industry the way it is today. By taking a look at the following list of awards nominated and won by Neighbours cast members you can see that it truly is a show that creates stars.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Aria Awards	17 (+18 Nominations)
MTV Music Awards	6
Top of the Pops (TOTP) Awards	4
Ivor Novello Awards	3
World Music Awards	3
NME Awards	2
GQ Men/Women of the Year	2
Screen Actors Guild Awards	2
Brit Awards	2 (+5 Nominations)
Golden Globe	1
BAFTA	1
Academy Award	1
Grammy Award	1 (+3 Nominations)

**Fig 5 – Awards Won (and Nominations) by Existing and Past Neighbours Cast**

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.AlanFletcher.net>

In addition to the above astonishing medley of stupendous awards, there have also been a total of fifty-five (55) UK Top 10 Hits, of which an amazing thirteen (13) have been number ones – unquestionably moulding the UK music scene as it goes. Modern day British artists cannot help but thank the likes of Kylie Minogue and Jason Donovan for preparing this fair country for the onslaught of commercial-pop.

Amazingly, that is not all. In a poll of the top films of all time<sup>12</sup>, impressively, three films including an ex-Neighbours cast member as either the lead or main character were voted into the top 50. This is no parsimonious feat, as they are alongside films of such calibre as The Godfather, Schindler's List, Casablanca and Star Wars among many more defining films.

## **Demographics**

Neighbours is watched by a very diverse clientele. When discussing the demographics of such a show, I feel it best to split up the possible audience into an exceptionally politically incorrect set of groups and deliberate on each. We shall scrutinise Age, Sex, Ethnic Origin, Occupation, Education and Social Standing.

*Age:* I started viewing Neighbours when I was a child of 11 years experience, and first started living away from home – I still watch it now, as does my mother. This means that the age range of the Neighbours viewer is a minimum of 45 years, spanning from 11-56 years of age, but I do not believe this to be accurate and trustworthy data – what if watching Neighbours was genetic?

To find a more accurate value for the age demographic of the Neighbours viewer, I need to look at population and TV ownership figures and data regarding the viewing preferences of age groups.

According to the UK National Statistics Archive<sup>13</sup>, the population of the United Kingdom in the late 1980s was approximately 57,000,000. From previously quoted data, we know that in this period there were Neighbours viewing figures “in the 10s of millions”. This isn't very accurate, but regardless, we know that at this point more British people watched Neighbours than there were people in Australia.

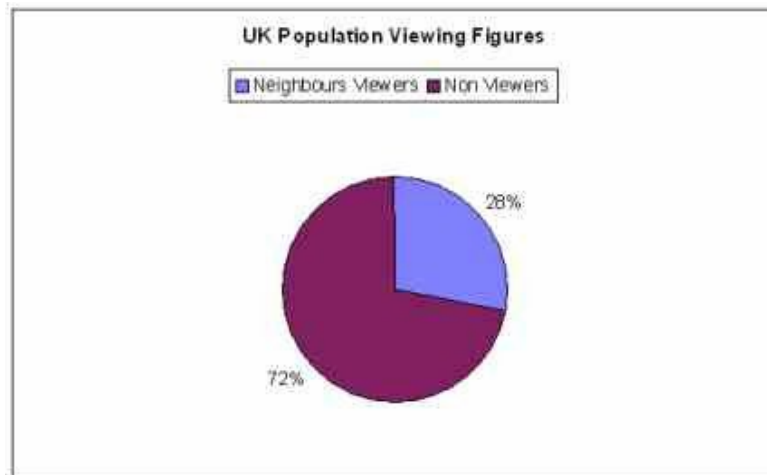
Using Australian Governmental figures<sup>14</sup>, I have found that the Australian population for the same period was approximately 16,000,000. To save guess work, we shall assume that the Neighbours viewers of this time were exactly that – sixteen million. This would make a graph akin to the following:

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<sup>12</sup> The Internet Movie Database's 250 top films list. <http://www.imdb.com/chart/top> Accessed 24<sup>th</sup> March 2006

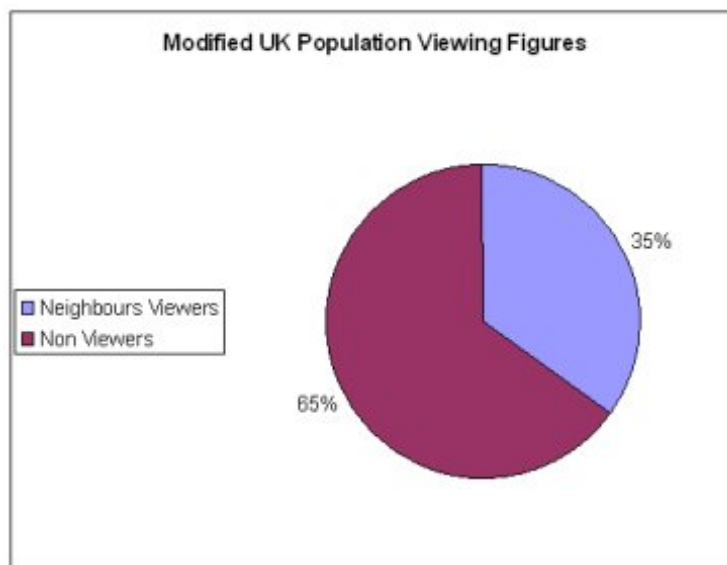
<sup>13</sup> UK National Statistics Archive – Population Data <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/glance/#population> Accessed 24<sup>th</sup> March 2006

<sup>14</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics – Population Growth Models <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/68180154bf128d91ca2569d000164365?OpenDocument> Accessed 24<sup>th</sup> March 2006



**Fig 6 – UK Neighbours Viewing Figures when Compared to the Entire UK Population (Late 1980's)**

This graph is still not truly representative of the population as a whole, as according to the National Statistics Archive, at this time, only 80% of UK households owned a television set, and as such had the facilities in place to view Neighbours. This means that 45,600,000 people owned a television, of which 16,000,000 watched Neighbours at its peak. That's slightly over 35% of the population! Modified graph warning...



**Fig 7 – UK Neighbours Viewing Figures when Compared to those in the UK with Facilities to Watch the Programme (Late 1980's)**

By analysing the many population trend graphs and data available from the UK National Statistics website<sup>15</sup> we can see that the average age in the late 1980s was somewhere in the region of 35, with the most people aged between 27 and 33 and a secondary worrying peak at approximately 48 years of age.

With slightly under a quarter of the population over 65 and a further fourth under 16, this leaves somewhere in the order of 26,000,000 people between the ages of 16 and

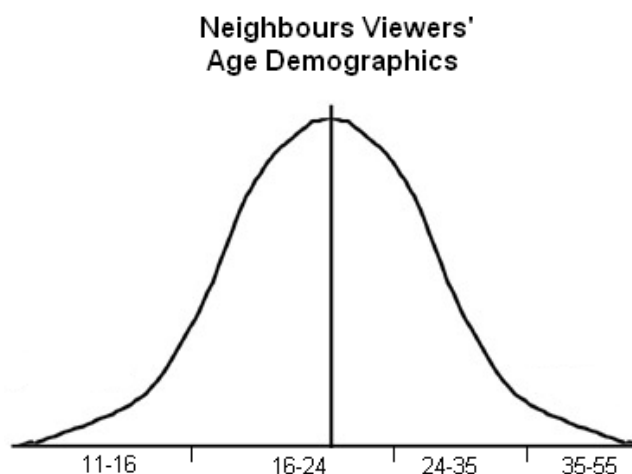
<sup>15</sup> UK National Statistics <http://www.statistics.gov.uk> Accessed between 20<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> March 2006.

65. According to BBC Commissioning Market Research<sup>16</sup>, those over the age of 55 rarely watch non-British made programmes, and rarer still watch drama during daytime television hours. From this, we can safely assume that television viewers over the age of 55 would not tune-in to watch Neighbours.

Those between the ages of 16 and 24 watch more soaps than any other age, with Eastenders topping the list, followed by Coronation Street and then Neighbours with a 85% audience share. A similar story appears for the 24-35 age-group, but with Neighbours appearing further down the list of top dramas – undeniably due to its horrible scheduling and the lack of an omnibus.

From the BBC Commissioning Market Research data we are able to establish that the major demographic that watch Neighbours is that of 16-35 year-olds, with a more abrupt drop in viewing figures above that, than below. This age group, with an audience share of 72% would make up approximately 12,500,000 million of the 16,000,000 required viewers in the late 1980s. Of the 3,500,000 remaining viewers required, it would be a good assumption that somewhere in the region of 2,500,000 would come from the 11-16 age-bracket, due to the high audience share that children's programming takes daily, finishing directly before Neighbours commences.

As they say – a picture is worth a thousand words, so following is a bell graph representing the age demographics of Neighbours.



**Fig 8 – Neighbours Viewers Age Demographics**

*Sex:* It is a well known fact that the sexual demographics of a television show are determined mostly by the content of the show (a DIY show for instance will have a mostly male audience, while a fashion show a largely female audience), the projected-beauty-factor of the cast members and finally by peer viewing figures (if more females watch a show, potential new male viewers are less likely to be drawn to it).

As an avid viewer of Neighbours and an ardent conversationalist, I know that the male viewers feel that the female cast members are more-than-averagely attractive, whilst the female viewers find the male characters equally as alluring, more on their charismatic and fascinating personalities than their looks.

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<sup>16</sup> BBC Commissioning Market Research <http://www.bbc.co.uk/commissioning/marketresearch>  
Accessed 24th March 2006.

With regards to peer viewing figures, from my personal experience and discussions with various other viewers of Neighbours, it is anticipated that this would also be equal; leading to the conclusion that this comedy/drama has a mutually favourable content for both male and female viewers, hence the sex demographic is equally spread between male and female viewers.

*Ethnic Origin:* I'll be brief – Neighbours has been shown in many countries around the world – countries where the chief population is that of many different and diverse ethnicities and cultures. The popularity and longevity of the show in any one country does not seem to be based on any sort of ethnic grounds, as can probably be shown by the varied ethnicities in Britain and Australia today – where the show is most popular.

*Occupation:* This is where it gets nasty. Everyone knows that the occupational-status of those who watch Neighbours are generally one of a set of two – either unemployed or a student. After all, these are the only two categories of people who can take the time to watch the programme at its current allocated time slots. Have you never wondered why the amount of students has increased? Why the percentage of unemployed who claim long-term incapacity benefit has increased? Regardless as to whether the BBC has some hidden agenda against the Labour government to increase these figures in order to eventually get a Conservative leader into office – these are the times of a person's life when they are in a cathartic state of utopian apathy, awaking from a deep sleep just in time to watch the first daily screening of Neighbours, before watching it again in the evening because of its Opium-like draw on the human condition.

Over these days, months and years of slothful de-productivity, one gets acclimatised to the effects of the twice-daily dose of Neighbours. It all feels fine until that fateful day when you realise that you need a bigger TV, more money for cigarettes and alcohol or you just plain get fat and decide that it's time to get a job (sometimes referred to as 'graduating'). You believe that you can easily give up the joys of daytime leisure in order to earn a nice salary and treat yourself to a pleasurable splurge once a month, so you apply to many jobs and eventually search one out.

It hits you like a Trainspotting junkie.

Countdown and Neighbours withdrawal symptoms combine to make the existing post-university depression a hellish experience. Everything seems like it's changing, and you feel like you're ageing before your time. You want to take back your youth with a vengeance. You can't, and the depression continues for many years to eventually become the dreaded, soul-crushing mid-life crisis. By this point it's too late to think of the causes, and you don't even remember what Neighbours was about. It's a terrible state.

Before this rallies into a snafu of ranting I'll get back on-topic. Fundamentally, those who watch Neighbours are tax evading, state-scrounging students and the unemployed.

*Education:* This demographic goes hand-in-hand with that of occupation. As I convincingly argued above, the occupation of the everyday Neighbours viewer is to, essentially, not have one. To be unemployed or a student is to watch neighbours.

This therefore leads to the evident deduction that the education of the average Neighbours viewer is either not very high (unemployed and uneducated), on the up (student) or medium-high and stable (unemployed yet educated).

Unfortunately, due to the comedic faculty of the Neighbours writers, the subtle undertones of almost every episode referencing any number of genres in any discipline, the first of these three (uneducated) would indisputably not understand the quality of the show, and as such despise the average viewer for watching such a pitiful show. Jealousy of intellect is a terrible thing.

In conclusion, the education of a Neighbours viewer is usually anywhere between average and high – age dependent, of course.

*Social Standing:* This demographic again goes hand-in-hand with that of occupation and education. From the obviously valid arguments of education, those who watch Neighbours are either unemployed and educated, or students currently in education. This means that the social standing of the average Neighbours viewer is currently relatively low, but will eventually rise to the upper-middle working class – that of Private Eye readership, 2.4 children, Mercedes ownership and a [semi-]detached property in the [suburbs/countryside]. (Delete as appropriate.)

This now finalises my prequel to the counter-argument. With all the above facts discovered and analysed, we know that there are a number of possible channels that an omnibus could be aired on and the merits and downfalls of each option. We know that Neighbours is a programme with world-wide appeal, starring talented actors and musicians that aren't just a side-feature to Britain, but a major player in its cultural development. We have also discovered that the average Neighbours viewer is between the age of 16 and 35, unemployed or in full-time education, at least reasonably educated, a member of the upper-middle working classes and of no particular ethnic group or sex.

From this, it is now possible to construct a logical, rational and palpable response to the BBC's argument that showing a Neighbours omnibus is either not possible or simply unjust.

## Counter-Argument

In this section, I plan on bestowing on you, my loyal readership, a coherent and irrefutably accurate counter-argument to the BBC's line of reasoning in their refusal to air a Neighbours omnibus.

In this rationale, references shall be made regarding information gathered, and results established in previous sections of the report – I shall not be referencing them directly for brevity reasons.

To initialise the proceedings, a run-down of the exposed evidence is required.

- BBC One currently shows 250 minutes of pure, unadulterated Neighbours a week – one daily original shown during the 'daytime' menagerie of programmes, and one repeat an hour or two before the evening's prime-time shows commence.
- BBC One currently has a relatively full schedule, and as such it would be difficult, and possibly unreasonable, to request a 100-minute omnibus to be shown on the weekends or at most other plausible times. The only possible slot would be late at night where it could be shown instead of a live copy-feed from BBC News 24.
- BBC Two is great and should be left as it is.
- BBC Three *can* be great, but is usually horrendously disappointing due to the almost universally disliked 'Two Pint of Lager and a Packet of Crisps' that has a total airtime of 450 minutes weekly – 200 of which are repeats shown on the same day as the original airing.
- The typical Neighbours viewer is that of a student or ex-student who is currently unemployed. There are, of course, many exceptions to this rule.
- Those who would like a Neighbours omnibus are typically ex-students who have managed to get lumbered into a full-time job that prevents them watching either showing of Neighbours during a weekday. This means that the optimum time for a Neighbours omnibus would be either later afternoon or during the weekend, preferably somewhere between midday and late afternoon in order to allow the inevitable hangover to subside.

Let us remind ourselves of the BBC's contention for refusing to show a Neighbours omnibus.

"There isn't room in the schedule to show all 5 episodes at once. Neighbours is already shown twice a day 5 times a week which is more than most shows. Available spaces in the schedule have to be allocated fairly to allow room for a range of programmes."

Dissected into three parts, this rebuttal takes the shape of:

1. Lack of room in order to show an omnibus (100 minutes).
2. Neighbours is shown twice a day, 5 times a week – more than most shows.
3. Available space must be allocated fairly to allow room for programme variety.

Its scrutinising time.

1. The 'lack of room' case is valid, depending on your understanding of the word 'room'. Yes, currently the BBC schedule for the three most popular, and hence possible channels for an omnibus, are full – taken up by a multitude of shows. But are these shows of any discernible quality? Are they already shown excessively? Can this 'room' be made by simply re-jigging the existing schedule? From my research, there are only two possible shows that could be altered in order to show said omnibus. These are the BBC News 24 copy-feed shown late on BBC One and 'Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps' shown almost constantly on BBC Three.

In my opinion, and doubtless others' too, 'Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps' should be the one shown less frequently to facilitate the showing of a Neighbours omnibus. This show already has more airtime than Neighbours and is of indisputably less eminence to it. On top of this, even if this show were to be partially culled to show this 100 minute omnibus, it would still be shown for a total of 350 minutes weekly on BBC Three. This would equal that of Neighbours if there were an omnibus and the two daily shows were kept.

From this alone we can see the merits of showing an omnibus instead of a few episodes of 'Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps'.

2. The BBC believes that Neighbours is shown "more than most shows". Your belief of this statement depends on how literally you like to take this phrase. 'Most shows' would indicate that Neighbours is shown on a more frequent basis than, or has more airtime than, 50% of current shows.

How can one argue against this? I shan't even try, as the BBC needs to give a more reasonable or exact figure than this in order for me to disprove it. It is of course shown more than most shows, as it is many times more popular than most shows, as can be seen by the weekly, independent viewing figures for various shows on all channels.

Is Neighbours shown more frequently than programmes of equal or greater quality and popularity? Most of them, no – some of them, yes. What is more important here is that 'Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps' (sorry to go on like this) is shown a lot more than Neighbours currently is and ever has been, yet is undeniably less popular than it.

3. The 'fair allocation of space to show a variety of programmes' line is the most preposterous argument I've encountered. I am going to stick to my current line of opposition with 'Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps' as I feel this will allow me to most accurately explain my frustrations.

As one may know, this show is based around the lives of a few young, 20-something adults whose only thoughts seem to be those of alcohol and sex. This is stretched into a 25-minute episode that has so far been replicated into 44 episodes consisting of almost identical below-the-belt jokes and antics.

Only suitable for those over the age of 16, this show is of no appeal to those with an intellect equal to or greater than a 12-year-old prepubescent male.

The show is of no real value to our society either. For those viewers not from this fair country, it simply furthers the stereotype of the young Briton – a yobbish hooligan who drinks too much alcohol, has lots of unprotected sex and makes many bastard babies. For those from within the borders of this fair country, if you

want to see this behaviour, go to any town-centre in the country on a Friday or Saturday night or alternatively any Student Union in the country, any night of the week.

Note: Student Unions will only allow you to witness sexual humour, failed attempts at “scoring” and the effects of excess alcohol consumption, with the lack of hooliganism.

Neighbours though – now how often in this country do we get to see an Irish immigrant fairly accepted into a strange society? How often are there brutal plane crashes wiping out whole families in one go? Effectively, when did we last see a family oriented programme that shows murder, love and racial acceptance in harmony, creating a show of such calibre that most men would become celibate for life, just for the chance of another showing? I’ll answer all those questions for you – never! That is why we need Neighbours. This is a very varied programme that needs to be able to be shown to millions of workers around the country for their peace of mind.

Now, what would I suggest the BBC do in order to appease the masses and show a Neighbours omnibus? Well, in an ideal world, a Saturday or Sunday midday showing would be more than ideal. Either on BBC Three or on a terrestrial BBC channel. The overwhelming problem with this is that it would be totally impractical for the BBC, and as such would counteract the aspiration of this report with them dismissing my suggestion as preposterous and ignoring our pleas for an omnibus for the rest of time. This would be disastrous and I don’t know if I would be able to forgive myself for writing this, and further still, wouldn’t be sure if I could simply live without Neighbours in my life for another year.

A reasonable suggestion that I believe would appease almost everyone would be the following:

Take the average Sunday night schedule for BBC Three. Two episodes of ‘Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps’ are shown between 23:00 and 00:00 (midnight), and then the same episodes are repeated between 02:50 and 03:50 Sunday night / Monday morning.

If the BBC were to show a Neighbours omnibus starting at 23:00 and lasting for 100 minutes, it would end at 00:40, allowing a continuation of the scheduled programmes, whilst leaving space open for an extra 20-minute programme. This could mean the BBC could show a single episode of ‘Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps’ and show 10 minutes less of ‘Welcome to BBC Three’ in the early hours, or show a short programme.

As this show would undoubtedly be watched by the majority or viewers who missed any amount of the preceding weeks episodes, it could be a bit late for those who have work on a Monday morning and prefer to get an early night’s sleep beforehand. I personally have work at 8am Monday mornings, but I would definitely stay up ‘til 00:40 to watch a Neighbours omnibus. Regardless, this would allow the recording of the episodes to be very easy, and as such those who would prefer to sleep can easily watch it during the week when they are free, or the following weekend, ready to re-record over the tape for the next omnibus.

An added bonus for BBC Three if this was to happen would be that the programmes after the omnibus would get higher viewing figures. This would be due to many Neighbours omnibus viewers ‘staying tuned’ and watching the succeeding shows.

What can the BBC do in the 20 minutes extra they would open up for a show? Why not show independent or student short films (of 10-15 minutes in length)? This would allow people to see that the BBC is at the forefront of advertising the young talent in the country.

From a questionnaire specifically produced for this section of the report, those who do and do not (for various reasons) watch Neighbours, have said that a show at this time would definitely be a good compromise as they understand that the other options, whilst welcome, are not plausible. The results from this questionnaire follow:

Question	Amount	%
Do watch Neighbours.	11/20	55
Do <b>not</b> watch Neighbours.	9/20	45
Don't like it.	1/9	11
Cannot, due to previous commitments.	8/9	89
Would watch or record at this time if I missed episodes.	16/19	94
Would <b>not</b> watch or record at this time if I missed episodes.	1/19	6
Believe this report describes the optimum compromise for both the BBC and viewers, which the BBC should consider adopting.	20/20	100
I believe there are better options.	0/20	0

**Fig 9 – Questionnaire Results**

As you can see, the results are overwhelming. Of the people I asked, the majority watch Neighbours and from the minority who do not, the majority of those do not do so because they have previous commitments that disallow them from viewing (I explained that this included working during airtime).

Further, you can see that an overwhelming amount of current viewers (or those who would like to but cannot due to previous commitments) would be willing to either watch or record the proposed omnibus. (It is of significant note that the one person who watches Neighbours who said they would not watch or record this omnibus, would not do so because they do not own the facilities to view digital television.)

Finally, it is obvious that the proposed omnibus is widely accepted – both by those who do and those who do not currently watch Neighbours. All of those questioned, after reading my analysis have agreed that the suggested option for a Neighbours omnibus is, while not the preferred outcome, is the only real possible compromise, and one which nobody would mind seeing implemented.

Deduction: show the Neighbours omnibus on BBC Three on Sunday nights, making time in the schedule by showing a few episodes less of repeated ‘Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps’ whilst also freeing up a 20 minute slot for a low-risk inventive programme, if desired.

## Conclusion

Now, surely anyone can see the merits of what I am saying? I'm not expecting shows to be cancelled or moved in order to show Neighbours. I'm suggesting that a Neighbours omnibus replace repeated shows, specifically shows that are repeated merely hours after the original is shown

Yes, before anyone tells me that I'm being amazingly hypocritical here, seen as Neighbours is repeated every day. Add to that the fact that it's repeated 225 minutes after it's originally shown, my argument would seem to breakdown to the layperson. Alas, this is not the case as I shall demonstrate; this is simple, and straightforward enough for even the most imprudent of proletariats to comprehend...

*Neighbours is one of the most popular soaps on television, especially on the BBC channels – surpassed only by Eastenders.*

This alone should be enough of an argument to convert the disbelievers, considering all of the proof and analysis performed throughout this study. Regardless, they will expect more and here it is – if a Neighbours omnibus were to be aired at the aforementioned time in replacement of 'Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps' it would still be one of the most popular and widely viewed slots on the digital channel. Its appeal is so vast that those who cannot watch the programme in its regular slot will jump at the opportunity to watch it at this time. This is unmistakable logic that cannot be argued.

A last-stand, worst-case scenario settlement would be to not show an omnibus, but instead move the evening showing of the programme by an hour so that we workers can enjoy the benefits of our daily prescribed amount of Neighbours. Whilst this may produce many an argument it is simply but the only other possibility. One that nobody wants realised. An omnibus is the way forward.

So, join with me in the fight to bring a Neighbours omnibus to our screens. The world, and especially the middle class workers of Britain, need it. Not only will this realisation produce record numbers of happy British workers, it shall also indirectly increase the amount of workers in Britain as those who are self-proclaimed Neighbours addicts will not be confined to watch it during the day, thus halting their progress in the job market. This shall in turn increase the GDP of this fair country due to record employment figures, making this great isle a world super-power once again. Even those who are still sceptical, join us on this – it's for the children; their education. With more people willing to enter employment early due to the newly founded fact that they can now work and watch Neighbours at the same time, university applicants will go down, thus meaning that in the long term, a university degree will 'mean something' again and we can all live in a Neighbours utopia.

I bid you farewell and good watching.