

Monica Sims OBE (English Language and Literature, 1943)

1925-2018

Monica Sims enjoyed a distinguished career in broadcasting and was the most senior woman in the BBC on her retirement in 1984. She was the first woman to become Controller of BBC Radio 4, and the first woman to become Director of Radio Programmes at the BBC.

Monica Sims came up to St Hugh's in 1943, while the College site was operating as a head hospital during the Second World War. In reminiscences shared with the College, she recalled patrolling the glass-lined galleries in Oxford's Natural History Museum during the War, while her room-mate did fire-watching at the Radcliffe Camera. While at St Hugh's, she was heavily involved with the Oxford University Dramatic Society (OUDS) and the Experimental Theatre Club (ETC), of which she was secretary for a year.

Monica Sims began working at the BBC in 1953 as a talks producer, before moving to become a production assistant for women's programmes for BBC TV. In 1964, she became editor of *Woman's Hour*, breaking taboo by tackling topics such as the domestic division of labour, women's mental health, childcare and sexual orientation. She shared her experiences of *Woman's Hour*, and her early career, in an interview with Frank Gillard for the BBC Oral History Collection in 1986, excerpts of which are available [here](#). In 1967 she became the head of children's television programming, introducing a range of new programmes including the children's news bulletin, *Newsround*, first broadcast in 1972, and *Grange Hill* in 1978. She went on to become Controller of Radio 4 in 1978, and BBC Radio's Director of Programmes in 1983, just a year before she retired.

After retiring, Monica Sims was commissioned to investigate the shortage of women in BBC management. She produced her report in 1985 which concluded with 19 recommendations, including flexible working hours for women with children, part-time working and job-sharing. All but one of her recommendations were accepted, with parental leave for fathers being adopted at a later date. The report attracted criticism for not tackling the issue of indirect sex discrimination and for suggesting that the key reason for the lack of women in senior management was "a carefully considered decision" to have children.

In her retirement, Sims became Vice-President of the British Board of Film Censors, and Director of Production at the Children's Film and Television Foundation. She was also a member of the Council of Bristol University between 1990 and 1999, where she was Chairman of the Careers Advisory Board. She was awarded an Honorary DLitt by Bristol University in 2000.

Monica Sims was appointed OBE in 1971 and was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in 1984. She died in 2018 at the age of 93.

Sources

Karpf, Anne, 'Monica Sims obituary', *The Guardian* 30 November 2018

Soutter, Ann, and Mary Clapinson, eds, *St Hugh's College Register 1886-1959* (Oxford: St Hugh's College, 2011)

Papers relating to Monica Sims in the St Hugh's Archive

[Monica Sims interview with Frank Gillard for BBC Oral History Collection, 1986](#)