

In Conversation with John Whittingdale

At a very important time for broadcasting policy, VLV members were lucky to have the opportunity on 10 February 2016 to hear the Secretary of State, John Whittingdale's, thoughts on public service broadcasting. Damian Collins MP, a member of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, sponsored the event.

Colin Browne, Chairman of VLV, spent the first half hour in conversation with Mr Whittingdale, asking questions which had been sent in by attendees prior to the event.

The scope of the BBC, recent licence fee settlements, the purposes of the BBC, its governance and the Green Paper consultation were all covered in detail. Mr Whittingdale reassured the audience that all submissions to the Green Paper would be taken into consideration, despite recent rumours in the press that, because of a campaign run by 38 Degrees, the DCMS might disregard the majority of them. He also promised that a summary of responses to the Green Paper would be published, possibly before the BBC White Paper is released, which he anticipated at the end of May. He also promised that there would be an opportunity to comment on the White Paper before the new Charter is drafted.

On the future of Channel 4, the Secretary of State remained uncommitted. He said that he is considering all options to ensure the future of Channel 4, but that he was determined its remit would not be undermined. He said that he believes that the volume of Channel 4's public service content was declining which concerns him and that perhaps the broadcaster could do more.

Questions from the floor included topics such as radio, when Mr Whittingdale praise BBC Radio 1 for being distinctive, UK children's content which he says he is considering seriously because there is a deficit beyond the BBC, and the funding of the World Service.