

VLV SPRING CONFERENCE 2017 REPORT

How to ensure the citizen dividend: Public service broadcasting in a digital age

Wednesday 26 April 2017

The upcoming snap election, public trust in broadcasting, the World Service and BBC regulation were the issues which dominated the VLV conference on April 26th.

The day began with a speech by Damian Collins MP, Chairman of the Commons Select Committee for Culture, Media and Sport. Mr Collins covered a range of issues relevant to broadcasting in his speech. He said he was pleased that the government had decided against privatising Channel 4, but noted that the DCMS is still exploring whether it could have more presence in the regions. He referred to the ongoing challenge of how to define distinctiveness, as set out as a new commitment in the BBC Charter; for him it means creativity. And he also talked about the issue of fake news which has been a focus of the Committee in recent months.

The second session of the morning focused on 'alternative' facts and public trust in broadcasting. Chaired by Radio 4 *Feedback's* Roger Bolton, a panel of experts debated the challenges we all face in being able to trust the veracity of information in the social media age. Journalist and author Matthew d'Ancona has been writing a book which is due out in May on fake news and suggested that it will be the social media platforms who will end up regulating fake news when they recognise that it is having a negative impact on their business models. Jane Martinson, Head of Media at *The Guardian*, was clear that it is social media users themselves who need to accept responsibility for not re-posting content unless they know it is true. Stewart Purvis, former Chief Executive of ITN, highlighted that regulation is now two tier: there is no regulation of online content but there is regulation for due impartiality and accuracy of broadcasting. This means that broadcasters can put content online which they can't broadcast on TV or radio and this is confusing for audiences.

The afternoon kicked off with the annual VLV Awards for Excellence, hosted by Sir Tony Robinson. As in previous years, this was a joyful occasion when programmes on TV and radio were honoured with awards voted on by VLV members. Sir David Attenborough was presented with the Best TV Individual

Contributor award and the late Steve Hewlett, journalist and broadcaster, won the Best Radio Individual Contributor award. Barry Cryer, presenter of Radio 4's *I'm sorry I haven't a clue*, entertained the audience, regaling them with apparently spontaneous jokes, and Helen Boaden, former Director of BBC Radio made her acceptance speech live via satellite from America.

Following the awards, Fran Unsworth, Director, BBC World Service Group and Deputy Director of News and Current Affairs, presented highlights of the World Service's contribution for audiences around the world. Her full speech can be read [here](#). In it she highlighted that there is a greater need than ever for the World Service to provide impartial and accurate content in some of the world's most fragile states where reliable information is limited. Her presentation included clips from some of the 12 new language services the World Service is currently launching which have been recently announced as a result of extra investment from the government.

The closing session of the day explored the implications of changes to the regulation of the BBC following the institution of the new BBC Charter. Tony Close, Director of Content Standards, Licensing and Enforcement at Ofcom provided an overview of how the new model will work and then Tim Suter, the chair of the session, opened the debate to the other panellists, former BBC Trustee Richard Ayre and Professor Steven Barnett. There followed a lively Q&A when members of the audience challenged the panellists on a number of issues, including how audiences will be able to hold the BBC and Ofcom to account in the coming Charter period.

A transcript of the conference will be available in due course.