



Voice of the Listener and Viewer
Autumn conference 2015: Public Service Broadcasting –
Future Uncertain.

The recent Voice of the Listener and Viewer conference, Public Service Broadcasting – Future Uncertain, could not have come at a more crucial time in the history of PSB in the UK.

Rona Fairhead, Chair of the BBC Trust, outlined the two facets of the BBC, commenting that it operates in two parallel worlds, one under intense media scrutiny and rivalry and the other one where the public live with and love the broadcasting service with 97% of people using the BBC for 18 hours a week.

She pointed out that the current charter renewal had an unprecedented response from the public who want a better, protected BBC and she acknowledged that there was opposition about changes such as BBC3 moving to the iPlayer. With regard to funding, the public support the principle of universality and prefer a funding model like the licence fee or a household levy. She agreed with VLV's stance that the BBC must not be treated like a government piggy bank to be raided when times are tough. She also outlined the Trust's proposal for six new public purposes building on the historic mission to inform, educate and entertain but also reflecting, representing and serving everyone in the UK, reflecting the UK to the world and contributing to the UK's creative economy.

Lord Terry Burns, outgoing Chairman of C4, spoke about the disruption to the channel caused by the current uncertainty over its future with the Government assessing its operating model. He said he would be 'astonished' if the Government sold C4 just to raise revenue. If it were privatised, he was clear that the hour long 7pm news bulletin would not survive nor would many current affairs programmes which are currently supported by the surplus from other more popular content on the Channel 4 portfolio.

He pointed out that most of Channel 4's public service programming goes out at peak time and that the corporation is the only 'strong alternative' to the BBC as a public service voice.

Moving onto radio, Alan Davey, Controller of BBC Radio 3, talked passionately about the station and its diverse programming. He highlighted the fact that Radio 3 'can take risks and clear the schedule for remarkable things.' His intention is to bring back 'slow radio', letting performances run in full rather than cutting them back to fit the schedule for which the channel has recently been criticised. He defended the corporation's funding of five orchestras and pledged that he would not dumb down Radio 3 to compete with Classic FM. Asked about programming for children, he said that a new weekend show would begin next year introducing teenagers to classical music.

The afternoon session concluded with the 'wise people' panel which was made up of four industry experts who discussed the future of terrestrial television. There was little consensus among the panel members on what the future holds but many caveats for policy makers not to wreck our precious public service broadcasting system!