

*Championing  
excellence and diversity  
in broadcasting*

Founded in 1983 by Jocelyn Hay CBE



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14 July 2015

Rt Hon John Whittingdale OBE MP  
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport  
Department of Culture, Media and Sport  
4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
100 Parliament Street  
London  
SW1A 2BQ

Dear Secretary of State

**Re: BBC Licence Fee Settlement**

I am writing on behalf of the Voice of the Listener & Viewer following the Government's statement last week regarding the new licence fee settlement.

We are extremely disappointed by the lack of public transparency and consultation during the negotiation process which has led to this settlement, especially in light of recommendations made by your own Select Committee in March this year.

In the Select Committee report on the future of the BBC, as I am sure you are aware, you wrote: "No future licence fee negotiations must be conducted in the way of the 2010 settlement", "It was wholly wrong that the 2010 licence fee settlement [...] was not subject to any public or parliamentary consultation", "The 2010 settlement demonstrated that the BBC's independence can be compromised by negotiations with the government of the day that lack transparency and public consultation".

It would be fair to say that the announcement this week has led to a greater reaction from VLV's members than any other issue in recent years. There is universal outrage among VLV members on behalf of licence fee payers.

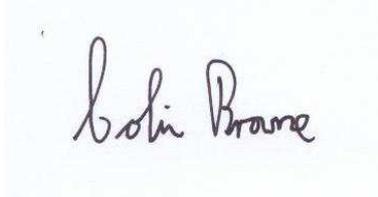
VLV opposes the move to use licence fee payers' money to fund free licences for the over 75's, a welfare commitment made by a government at a time when pensions were being cut. Using licence fee payers' money to fund other activities, such as broadband rollout or government social policy, undermines the fundamental purpose of the licence fee which is supposed to be collected to pay for BBC services for the benefit of licence fee payers.

It is VLV's view that the process by which the licence fee has been negotiated, both in 2010 and now in 2015, undermines the independence of the BBC. This is government interference which the BBC is unable to resist. While it may be 'legitimate', in Rona Fairhead's words, it is unacceptable.

Despite assurances to the contrary we are far from convinced that this is a 'flat' settlement and would welcome any greater detail you might be able to provide on projections of income for the BBC which arise from this settlement.

In particular, may we have clarification on the statement you made in the House on July 6<sup>th</sup>? In an interview with *The Guardian*, published on the same day you were quoted as saying: "If the conclusion of charter renewal is that the BBC should not be doing all the things it is doing now, then it will not be going up with inflation." This clearly suggests that the licence fee will only be linked to CPI if the BBC continues providing exactly what it provides currently, whereas it is widely accepted that with this settlement it will be virtually impossible to preserve current services intact. Will this mean that the Chancellor's promise to link the licence fee to CPI will be effectively negated? I would welcome any clarification you can make on this point.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Colin Browne". The signature is written in a cursive style and is centered within a light blue rectangular box.

**Colin Browne**

Chairman, Voice of the Listener & Viewer

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