



**Voice of the  
Listener & Viewer**

# Bulletin

Working for Quality and Diversity in Broadcasting

Summer 2008

Issue 93

## Citizenship and Broadcasting – Putting the Public into Public Service Broadcasting

Thursday, 2 October – Woburn House, Tavistock Square, London WC1

Philip Graf



Ofcom's principal duty as set out in the 2003 Communications Act, is to further the interests of citizens in relation to communication matters; and to further the interests of consumers in relevant markets, where appropriate by promoting competition. The purpose of Ofcom's first consultation is to discuss and clarify its role in regard to its duty to citizens, a point many have felt Ofcom has subordinated to its duty to further the interests of consumers by promoting competition.

The principles of public service broadcasting have never been precisely defined in the UK but most would accept that serving the interests of citizens is one of the most important.

In VLV's opinion these two consultations are therefore inseparably linked.

Philip Graf, Deputy Chair of Ofcom and Chairman of its Content Board will explain Ofcom's thinking on them and on how Ofcom intends to proceed with the 2nd phase of its Review of Public Service Television. We have also invited a BBC Trustee to speak on the role of the corporation's public purpose remit in sustaining citizenship and civil society.

VLV will hold an afternoon conference at Woburn House, Tavistock Square, London WC1 on 2 October to discuss the implications of two Ofcom consultations. The first consultation is its discussion paper on Citizens, Communications and Convergence, published on 11 July (deadline 8 October), the second is Phase 2 of its Review of Public Service Broadcasting (Television) to be published on 25 September.

## VLV Chairman to Step Down



VLV Chairman and Founder, Jocelyn Hay, stated at last year's November AGM that she wished to step down from the leadership during the coming year. After steering the organisation through its first 25 years, she felt it time to pass the baton to new hands. The members of the VLV Board have suggested that on her retirement Mrs Hay should be invited to become Honorary President, a proposal which she has accepted with great pleasure. Mrs Hay will also be continuing her close association with the Voice of the Listener Trust.

## Jon Snow to launch VLV's Silver Jubilee Appeal on 2 October 2008



Jon Snow the Channel 4 newscaster and broadcaster, will launch VLV's 25th Anniversary Appeal. In November VLV will celebrate twenty five years of successful

lobbying and advocacy and we are launching a major appeal on 2 October in order to help set the organisation on a firmer footing to meet the challenges and changes ahead. Jocelyn Hay, chair of VLV, said 'I am delighted that Jon Snow had kindly agreed to launch the Appeal and present the VLV Student Essay prizes on 2 October'.

## VLV's 2008 Student Essay Competition

'Do citizens and consumers have different needs from their communications environment, or is this a meaningless distinction?' was the theme of the competition. Channel 4 has kindly donated £1000 in prize money. Jon Snow will present the winners with their prizes on 2 October.

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## Voice of the Listener & Viewer

*Working for Quality and Diversity in British Broadcasting*

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(reg charity 296207)

VLV's sister charity

which supports VLV's educational work

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### VLV office hours:

9.30am - 5.00pm Mon-Thurs

Voice of the Listener & Viewer Ltd (VLV) represents the citizen and consumer interests in broadcasting and works for quality and diversity in British broadcasting. VLV is free from political, sectarian and commercial affiliations. VLV is concerned with the issues, structures, institutions and regulation that underpin the British broadcasting system and in particular to maintain the principles of public service in broadcasting. VLV does not handle complaints.

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# Extraordinary General Meeting Called for 2 October 2008

In order to elect a successor to Jocelyn Hay as Chairman of VLV Ltd, and pave the way for her to become Honorary President, an Extraordinary General Meeting of the company will be held on Thursday, 2nd October at 11.00am, at Woburn House, Tavistock Square, London WC1. All members are invited to attend and vote.

Nominations for the post of Chairman of VLV Ltd are invited. They should be sent to the Company Secretary at 101 Kings Drive, Gravesend, Kent, DA12 5BQ, no more than 21 days or less than 3 days before the meeting. Nominations must be in writing, signed by a member qualified to attend and vote at the meeting and indicating his or her intention to propose a person for election, accompanied by a notice in writing signed by another member qualified to attend and vote at the meeting, of his or her intention to second the nomination. In addition, there should be included a notice in writing signed by the nominee of his or her willingness to be elected. That person must also be a member of VLV Ltd., and the notice shall give particulars of that person who would, if he/she were so elected, be required to be included in the register of Board members.

## 20 Years Loyal Service



It is 20 years this September since Linda Forbes came to work for VLV. She started as a part-time secretary to Jocelyn Hay. She valued the flexibility the position gave her as the mother of two young boys. Over the years Linda has assumed more and more responsibility and in that time she has become well-known to members as our Conference and Events Administrator, and the owner of the friendly voice that usually answers the phone.

We thank Linda for all she has done for VLV and offer her every good wish for the future.

## In Memoriam

It is with great sadness that we announce the death of three staunch VLV supporters.

Sheila Coyle who died in June joined Voice of the Listener, as it then was, in 1986 and was elected to the Committee of Management soon after. Sheila, a passionate animal and dog lover, was also a keen radio listener and radio dramatist who played an active role in many VLV activities. They included providing a valuable base and ongoing support for the members who in 1987 manned our stall at the ten day Radio Exhibition at Earl's Court, close to her then home. Sheila remained a keen supporter after moving to Milton Keynes during the 90's to live with her sister Jackie, to whom we extend our most sincere sympathy.

Sir Charles Wheeler, the distinguished radio and television broadcaster was not a member but a strong supporter of VLV and its objectives. Members will remember that Sir Charles kindly gave an evening lecture for VLV in early 2006

and that he chaired a memorable session of VLV's Autumn Conference in 2007 at which three overseas commentators based in London gave their views on the state of British broadcasting. Sir Charles joined the BBC shortly after the war and continued to broadcast on radio and television until his death in July. We extend our deepest sympathy to Lady Wheeler and his family.

Christopher Waldo Smith who died earlier this year, joined VLV in 2000. He was not an active member and seldom attended VLV conferences, although he enjoyed taking part in some VLV visits to broadcasting centres. He was, however, a strong supporter of our work and aims, sending small donations when he could. We are now most grateful for the legacy of £500 that he left VLV in his will. This has enabled us to buy a badly needed new computer for Sue Washbrook, VLV's membership Secretary. We extend our sympathy to all his family and friends.

# Children's Television - A Glimmer of Hope?

Wednesday 5 November 2008, 9.45am – 5pm  
The New Connaught Rooms, London WC2

Children's television in the UK is experiencing its most severe reduction in funding in more than fifty years and, as Ofcom has found, this is unlikely to be made up on commercial channels without public intervention. ITV 1 especially, has almost abandoned children's – and plans to withdraw from other specialist genres such as religious and regional programmes, because it says it cannot sustain such niche genres in today's competitive market.

VLV has been warning about the growing crisis for several years and, now that Ofcom has also drawn attention to it, we believe some glimmers of hope are appearing and that, given the political will, a solution can be found. VLV's conference in November takes place before the deadline for Ofcom's consultation on the 2nd Phase of its PSB Review. It

will provide the latest news, an analysis of the issues and a valuable opportunity for all interested parties to question the political parties on their policies before sending their responses.

Among the confirmed speakers are:



Floella Benjamin OBE (left), producer, writer and presenter and former member of the Ofcom Content Board; Ed Vaizey MP, Shadow Minister for Culture (Cons); John Grogan MP, (Lab) Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the BBC; Richard Deverell (far left), Controller, BBC Children's; Nick Wilson, Head of Children's & Young People, Channel Five; Nigel Pickard, Director of Family Entertainment, RDF; Anna Home OBE, Chair of Save Kids' TV; and Maggie Brown, media author and journalist. Speakers from Channel 4, S4C and the Liberal Democrats to be confirmed.



## Choice in Broadcasting – can quality be sustained? VLV's 25th Annual Autumn Conference

Wednesday 26 November 2008, 10.30am – 3.30pm  
The Geological Society, Burlington House, London W1



2008 has been a difficult year for all of Britain's broadcasters with abuses of trust, funding problems, difficulties with reception as the switch of the UK from analogue to digital television gathers pace, and diminished levels of trust. There have, of course, been some triumphs, most recently the BBC coverage of the Olympics. So how does the future look? Where in future will the funding to maintain quality come from? As every home gains access to a multitude of channels is more going to turn out to be less? Ofcom and the public see the BBC continuing as the cornerstone of British broadcasting, but with new heads at BBC Radio and BBC 1, what does the future hold for the Beeb? Can the BBC maintain its standards? How much may be sacrificed in the struggle for ratings? And how necessary

should that struggle have to be?

Tim Davie (above), who replaces Jenny Abramsky as BBC Director of Radio and Music on her retirement in September, will be a keynote speaker at the conference. Other speakers to be confirmed shortly.

The conference will be followed at 4pm by the 6th AGM of VLV Ltd.

## Secretary of State addressed packed Committee Room for VLV



Culture Secretary, Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP, spoke to more than 100 VLV members and guests in the House of Commons on June 24th.

His theme was standards – the guiding principles that

have made British broadcasting so well trusted in the UK and around the world: principles that cover impartiality and accuracy in TV and radio news reporting, editorial integrity and protection against harm and offence. Principles that become even more important as we look to the future.

Standards are part of the British brand when it comes to world markets, he said. People look to British programming because it is produced to high standards. That's why the BBC website is the third most visited in the UK and why all round the world people buy in to the BBC and Sky News, and why ITV's Morse is sold to 200 other countries. Trust is what people value most, as Ofcom's recent research found. The growth of the internet has been so fast that it has generated real pressure and the temptation to chip away at existing standards. But if we do, we risk changing forever how people at home and broad think about original British programming.

That's why he was surprised when recently the Conservative Party proposed the removal of the impartiality requirements for non-public service TV News. With so much of the online world untrusted he felt standards of accuracy, impartiality and trustworthiness should be preserved, not dismantled.

That's why the recent premium phone line scandals were so damaging together with the threat of product placement in TV programmes. Under the new European Audio Visual Services Directive the Government is obliged to consider this and the Government would be issuing a consultation in July.

Mr Burnham took nearly 20 questions before saying that he had found the opportunity to interact with VLV members so valuable that he would like to make it a regular event.

## Secretary of State returns to speak to VLV

9 December 2008

Mr Burnham has now agreed to address another VLV Westminster seminar in December, starting at 6pm in the House of Commons.

More details in the October Bulletin and on the VLV website, [www.vlv.org.uk](http://www.vlv.org.uk)

## From the Chairman



Our broadcasting services are at a crossroads, with more change to come in the next few years than in fifty before. Now is the time, I believe, for every thinking person to stand up and speak up for what they value and have no wish to lose. The launch of the second phase of Ofcom's consultation on its Review of Public Service Broadcasting will present one of the last and perhaps most important opportunities to affect

the future of this immensely influential industry which has such a powerful impact on our culture, democracy and values.

VLV itself cannot be immune to changes, having grown in the past twenty five years to become the leading advocate for all those working to retain the quality and diversity of public service broadcasting. It now needs to grow further and adapt if that force for good is to be maintained in the face of fresh challenges.

Having led VLV from the time of its inception twenty-five years ago, the moment has come for me to pass the leadership of this unique organisation to new and younger hands, as I foreshadowed at last November's AGM.

We have a strong team in VLV's Board of Management, a loyal and experienced staff and a wonderfully loyal and supportive membership to take the organisation forward. It is a good time to be passing the baton to new and younger hands.

I shall still remain in a supportive, but less active role, as Honorary President, and closely associated with the Voice of the Listener Trust, VLV's supporting charity. I look forward to having more time to devote to other long-neglected interests but I shall continue to sustain the vitally important work that VLV does on behalf of the citizen and consumer.

Many, many people have helped me and VLV over the years – neither of us would be where we are without that unstinting support. I would like to thank them and ask that they continue to support this unique organisation. Its role will become even more important in a future which is likely to see the growing commercialisation of programmes under a regulatory system more and more compliant with those who wish to reject the traditions of public service.

# Consultations and Responses

VLV has recently responded to the following consultations:

## OFCOM'S REVIEW OF PUBLIC SERVICE TELEVISION, PHASE 1 – JUNE (see also opposite page)

VLV welcomed the Review's stress on the viewer as citizen as well as consumer and its finding that viewers place a high value on current PSB programming, in particular, UK-made programmes. VLV recognises that viewing habits will

continue to change but believes that PSB content will remain at the core of valued viewing in the UK.

VLV agrees that the majority of British viewers see a securely-funded BBC as the primary source of their television viewing and the cornerstone of British broadcasting but also that a new funding model will be required to sustain PSB on the commercially funded channels after digital switch-over. VLV is opposed to any form of 'top-slicing' the BBC licence fee income, a move which it considers would be harmful not only to the BBC but to the whole broadcasting industry.

Of the four funding models suggested by Ofcom, VLV considers a combination of Model 1 (Evolutionary) and Model 3 (BBC and Channel

4 plus limited competitive funding) to be the best.

VLV has particular concerns about the future for children's programming and the prospects for the BBC and commercial PSBs in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the regions of England

## BBC PROPOSED LOCAL VIDEO SERVICE – JULY

VLV believes its proposed Local Video Service will help the BBC fulfil at least three of its public purposes: sustaining citizens and civil society; representing the UK, its nations, regions and communities; and helping to deliver to the public the benefits of emerging communications technology and services. VLV seeks assurance, however, that the new proposals will not have an adverse impact on the market for alternative local media.

## B CAP CONSULTATION ON UNFAIR AND MISLEADING ADVERTISEMENTS – JULY

The British Committee on Advertising Practice is proposing to amend its Code of Practice for radio and TV advertisements. VLV is concerned that the proposed new framework may not guarantee that viewers and listeners to UK services can take forward a complaint or obtain redress as the

result of a misleading or unfair advertisement. BCAP, the Advertising Standards Authority and Ofcom should devise a clearer and more transparent system for complains and redress.

## BBC TRUST REVIEW OF THE BBC'S CHILDREN'S SERVICES – AUGUST

The BBC Trust's Review of the BBC's children's services takes place at a time of severely reduced spending on children's programming and hopes that a way can be found to maintain plurality in the genre. VLV considers that the role of the BBC, especially in providing indigenously produced content aimed primarily at children in the UK, will become even more important in future.

While the BBC's digital channels, CBBC and CBeebies are excellent, VLV is concerned that recent statements by BBC executives seem to indicate that children's programmes are no longer to be a high priority for the BBC, a concern borne out by the reduction in output on BBC 1, which now ends 20 minutes earlier, the narrowing range of drama and factual programming for children, and the way in which programming for the 9 to 12s has suffered.

Copies of VLV responses can be seen on [www.vlv.org.uk](http://www.vlv.org.uk) or by sending a large self addressed envelope with 44p in stamps to the VLV office.

## Guest Contributor Patrick Barwise, Professor Emeritus, Business and Marketing, London Business School



Patrick Barwise is an expert on TV audience behaviour and broadcasting policy, an enthusiastic supporter of VLV, and a member of the Which? Council. He was a speaker at VLV's seminar on 3 June at the LSE on Ofcom's Consultation on its PSB Review. Here he sets out his views.

"It's the programmes, stupid", says Patrick Barwise. Ofcom's review could help.

Ofcom has done a great job in Phase One of its review of Public Service Broadcasting by commissioning excellent audience research, and trying to base the policy options on the results.

As Ofcom says, an independent, well-funded BBC is essential in order to ensure continuing large-scale provision of UK-produced free-to-air public service content – which is what audiences want. A strong BBC is more important now than ever because of the financial pressures on the commercial broadcasters who also carry public service programmes. The BBC is by far the best public service broadcaster in the world. Chipping away at the licence fee has already weakened the Corporation, and it should stop.

### THE PUBLIC ALSO VALUES PLURALITY

But the public also rightly values plurality in PSB – commercial broadcasters competing with the BBC to make the best programmes. This rules out Ofcom's Model 2 (BBC only). The right way forward should be a combination of Model 1 (evolution of the present system) and Model 3 (BBC and Channel 4 + limited extra funding for which broadcasters would compete).

### CHANNEL 4

Channel 4 is a successful, publicly-owned broadcaster which is almost self-funding. With a little more support it can continue to provide UK-produced public service content in competition with the BBC, but based on more risk-taking and slightly younger audiences.

In addition to the BBC and Channel 4, there should be competitive funding of very specific PSB content such as children's TV and regional news. It may also be possible to negotiate with the two privately-owned commercial broadcasters (ITV and Channel five) to ensure that they make more UK-produced public service programmes than they otherwise would. This focused competitive funding could be done through Ofcom. A separate "Arts Council of the Air" would add

unnecessary complexity.

The real problem is the level of funding – where the money for public service broadcasting is to come from in future.

I would advocate first, a licence fee rising slightly faster than general inflation. This would allow the BBC to provide indirect support for Channel 4 in various ways, though not by 'top-slicing'; and second, limited public funding through selling spectrum to commercially-funded PSBs for a lower price than the giant telephony and technology companies will pay.

### THREE UNNECESSARY PROBLEMS

But there are also three unnecessary problems we should clear out of the way now.

- First, we should ignore the economic fundamentalism that insists it's wrong to interfere with the market, even to keep our broadcasting as good as it is.
- Second, our politicians must stop being frightened of big media moguls and do the right thing.
- And third, we must stop panicking about new technology. The fact is that total television viewing is almost steady, even among younger viewers. Most of the new technologies (on-demand TV, mobile TV, interactive TV, user-generated TV, etc) have been enormously overhyped in terms of audience appeal and revenue potential. The overwhelming evidence is that in 2020 TV channels will still be the main way people find programmes and that most viewing will still be live, on a TV screen, and heavily skewed towards the main channels.

The antidote to all three of these unnecessary problems – market fundamentalism, vested interests, and technology hype – is evidence. This brings us back to my first point, the Ofcom research on the audience's view. Ofcom's DNA is still largely economic, but it does try hard to be evidence-based. The evidence it's come up with is that the audience wants a continuing supply of good, British-made programmes. We must all hope the evidence wins.

## Ofcom's Review of Public Service Broadcasting Television



Stewart Purvis, Ofcom Partner, Contents and Standards and Patrick Barwise were the speakers at VLV's seminar in association with LSE's media Policy think tank Polis, 3 June. Chair: VLV Board member, Professor Ivor Gaber.

Mr Purvis summarised research by Ofcom and the four options Ofcom had identified for funding public service broadcasting in future.

Ofcom's research found that viewers value plurality but attach importance to PSB purposes which depend on UK-made programming.

Money spent on UK-made programmes comes almost entirely from the PSB channels and is in serious and continuing decline.

The internet presents new opportunities for the delivery of PSB content – but its current reach and impact are limited.

A new model is needed for funding PSB because the existing one will not remain fit for purpose. Ofcom has set out four possible models for funding PSB on which it invited comments. The four models were:

1. **Evolution:** The BBC remains the cornerstone of PSB. The commercial channels retain a special role but their obligations are reduced over time or they are given more funding to help them fulfil their PSB responsibilities.
2. **BBC Only:** The BBC becomes the sole UK PSB with an extended role to fill gaps in the market.
3. **The BBC and Channel 4 plus limited competitive funding:** The BBC and Channel 4 together with other commercial broadcasters who compete for long-term funding from public funds to provide plurality. These public funds could come from regulatory assets, direct Government grant and/or a levy on, or top-slice of, the licence fee.
4. **Broad Competitive Funding:** The BBC remains the core PSB institution with long-term transferable funding supporting competition to the BBC. The transferable funding would come from regulatory assets, Government grant and/or the licence fee.

Mr Purvis was followed by Professor Barwise who sets out his arguments opposite.

On 17 July Ofcom published a summary of the responses it received, please visit: [www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/psb2](http://www.ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/psb2)

Ofcom will be launching the 2nd phase of its consultation on 25 September. Some of the issues will be covered during the conference VLV is holding on 2nd October.

## Book Reviews

### THE CREATIVE PERSPECTIVE – THE FUTURE ROLE OF PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

Published by Premium Publishing ([www.premiumpublishing.co.uk](http://www.premiumpublishing.co.uk)) for the BBC as part of its response to Ofcom's PSB Review, June 2008.

ISBN: 0-9550411 – 8 X.  
Edited by Glenwyn Benson and Robin Foster.



This book, with a foreword by Mark Thompson, BBC Director General, encapsulates the result of the BBC's consultation with audiences adding a range of views from representatives of the creative industries. They include Sir David Attenborough, Jeremy Fry and Will Hutton, Chief Executive of the Work Foundation. It also includes the results of a survey of the views of the creative community conducted by Human Capital Limited and five essays from leading independent producers.

### EMPOWERMENT THROUGH MEDIA EDUCATION, AN INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

Published by the International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media, NORDICUM at Göteborg University, Sweden.  
([www.clearinghouse@nordicom.gu.se](mailto:www.clearinghouse@nordicom.gu.se))  
ISBN: 978-9189471-56-6 Edited by Ulla Carlsson, Samy Tayie, Geneviève Jacquinet-Delaunay and José Manuel P'érez Tornero.



This book is based on the First International Conference on Media Education March 2007, and on the International meeting on Media Education in Paris in June 2007. It comes as the result of cross-cultural cooperation between a number of organisations including the Mentor Association, Dar Graphit for Media Services, UNESCO, the European Commission, the French National Commission for UNESCO and the Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media at Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. It covers a range of academic views and is intended to stimulate debate and research into media education.

## Is Freeview your first choice?

Many VLV members and viewers have encountered problems with the reception of Freeview tv and radio programmes, mainly because the digital signal was either not available from their local transmitter or, if available, too weak for reliable viewing. In our own situation in rural Kent, an early investment in a new 'Wideband, High Gain, Digital' TV aerial, whilst improving programme reception, failed to solve the problems of disintegrating pictures and intermittent blank screens. Even a series of new up-graded Freeview 'digiboxes' failed to resolve these difficulties!

In May the BBC finally launched its new FREESAT service – an option for which VLV has been campaigning for years. This new satellite-based service will run alongside the terrestrial system and reach homes not easily accessible by Freeview. We decided to invest in an entirely new installation, consisting of satellite dish, cable and FREESAT set-top box.

The results obtained so far have been spectacular. The selection of available programmes is similar to Freeview, with the exception of Channel Five, which has yet to decide whether or not to use the satellite. We find that the overall quality and reliability of reception of these FREESAT programmes is an enormous improvement on the service offered by Freeview in our area. It seems we have

made a very worthwhile investment.

If you are considering your digital options, you now have two alternatives. If you choose FREESAT, you will need to consider the following points:

- The siting of the satellite dish is critical. It must be located where it can 'see' the satellite and not be obscured by tall buildings or other obstacles. But this is also true of Freeview aerials.
- FREESAT set-top boxes are available in Standard Definition (SD) or High Definition (HD) configurations.
- If you wish to use your existing analogue or pre-HD ready tv receiver, then you should purchase the SD version.
- HD ready receivers can be used with an SD set-top box to receive SD Freesat channels or, with an HD set-top box if you also wish to view those programmes transmitted on the BBC High Definition Channel.
- Some of the latest tv receivers incorporate a module making all FREESAT programmes available without a set-top box, although a dish is still required.

Finally, if you currently use an indoor aerial for analogue tv, it is most unlikely to work on 'digits'. Throw it away and get a dish – think FREESAT!  
Bob and Pauline Fletcher, Ashford, Kent

## Letters to the Editor

### RECEPTION PROBLEMS – DIGITAL TELEVISION & HD

*I purchased a digital TV device with high definition facilities in a moment of madness. When someone tells me to press the red button, nothing happens. BBC 2 is not available on this set via the analogue facilities – the screen is a blue blank. By the digital facilities I mostly get coloured stripes obliterating the picture unless the service dies altogether, or just goes silent. It is not possible most of the time to watch BBC 2 at all, or any digital channels. I think that all the promised help and support for those of us who are not computer literate is just hot air. The telephone numbers either do not get a contact or we are given another number to phone. It's just a run around. I have telephoned 08700 10 10 10 and get long recorded messages which are useless.*

*The Philips instruction book boasts nine languages but I hope the other eight work better than the English, which is incomprehensible. I do not have a blog, web, podcast, email, MP3, iplayer, computer or mobile telephone so I have effectively been cast into oblivion along, no doubt, many others likewise. When I try to use the subtitle mode because the sound has gone, I get exciting new words like whapts, peate, wy, prok, woos etc.*

*Do you call this a service? I call it a shambles. Why on earth should anyone bother with digital?*  
M Thornett-Roston, Cheltenham, Glos.

### BOB FLETCHER REPLIES:

*Mrs Thornett-Roston lives in the Cotswolds, an area with many geographical contours. Such features can give rise to many tv reception difficulties. To provide programmes to this and similar areas of the UK, the tv broadcasters have installed, over the years, a network of high-power far-reaching analogue transmitters. Where the terrain has caused reception problems, they have installed a number of very small local tv transmitters, called translators. Each translator receives its analogue programmes directly from its parent high-power transmitter and broadcasts them within its immediate area. Eg. one of the transmitters in the West Country, called Ridge Hill, has nineteen subordinate translators.*

*Although all the high-power transmitters have now been converted to digital, most of the translators have NOT and may never be converted. The broadcasters maintain that, when the regional analogue programmes are finally switched off in each area, their digital replacements may not require the translator system.*

*I believe that Mrs T-R may currently be viewing analogue programmes provided by a local relay*

## Letters to the Editor

(her new TV aerial may even be directed at one), which has not been adapted for digital. As a result, her analogue reception remains unchanged, but she is unable to access digital services.

*Solution?* She should perhaps consider installing BBC/ITV Freesat – see the article on page 6.

**Editor's note:** For members who are experiencing problems receiving DAB radio, the digital terrestrial TV service Freeview or HD TV, please also see Bob Fletcher's letter on page 6 'Is Freeview your first choice?'

### HIGH DEFINITION LISTINGS

One of the frustrations of people subscribing to BBC High Definition TV is that the listings are very poor. The evening schedule can be viewed at [www.bbc.co.uk/bbchd](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbchd) or on the HD schedule link on the BBC's home page. But this is not good enough for viewers seeking to set up a week's recordings on a PVR like Sky or Freeview Plus. There are no listings in Radio Times. The BBC Trust has drawn the problem to the attention of BBC Management and I am assured that action is being taken to address it. I hope it's soon.

Warren Newman, Greenwich

### REFRESHING THE BULLETIN

*Re: Graham and Bridget Gosney's letter in the last VLV Bulletin, the trouble with the Bulletin is that it is addressing two audiences – broadcasting aficionados and ordinary listener/viewers.*

*The former want the esoteric stuff, the latter simply want to know about events well in advance so we can keep the dates free, reports of conferences so we can know what occurred if we were unable to attend, and lots of members' views in the Letters section in order to encourage lively debate.*

*I agree with the Gosneys that a more up-to-date presentation, with more white space, would make the whole much more readable and enjoyable.*

Cynthia McDowall, Derby

*I refer to your note about refreshing the Bulletin in the last edition of Letters to the Editor.*

*It is an excellent publication and I read every word. My plea is thus that a larger point size is used as there is a lot of reading. The small point size also gives a dense feel to the publication, and it is anything but. Many thanks for inviting comment.*

Liza Miers, by email

**Editor's note:** We are grateful for these comments and have allowed more white space in this issue. But we can only include readers' views if we receive them. This time we have more than we can print and have had to shorten all to make them fit within the space.

### VLV EVENING ON OFCOM CONSULTATION

*Thank you for organising the consultation evening in June. I was reminded of the old spiritual 'Everybody wants to go to heaven but nobody wants to die.' Everyone acknowledges the value of the BBC but how to convince the public of the need to pay for it remains a problem. When you consider*

*what people are prepared to pay for Sky, I wonder what the BBC could do with that sort of money. There appear to be no TV channels of the quality of Radio 3 or Radio 4 and no serious music channel.*

*Two areas bother me: the first is 'instant news.' The desperate need to get there first, without checking facts. Often the news is only partly right. If they had waited, embarrassment and distress could be avoided.*

*The second is single-interest channels. The traditional channels show a mixture of programmes, a 'window on the world' You could switch on to see a football match and get the last five minutes of a ballet or vice versa. Now you can choose never to see sport or documentaries. I don't think this is progress. Are we banging our heads against a brick wall or shall we carry on fighting for 'quality and diversity in broadcasting'? I hope I know the answer*

Renee Bravo, London E18

*I was very sorry to miss the seminar at the LSE. I wonder if the following came up?*

*The grounds for refusing to give the needed increase in the licence fee were presumably the cost to the vulnerable. This was compounded by the threat of top slicing it to support Channel 4. The BBC was also given the task of paying for the adaptation to digital for the elderly and poor, surely a responsibility of the Social Services? Yet the licence fee cost could well be exceeded by the cost of the necessary electricity to run the new digital equipment. When we got our digital radio, before we got a rechargeable battery, it cost £4 a week in batteries just to listen to the news. Many elderly people have tv on for much of the day. That would cost a great deal more than £4. Meanwhile, the BBC has cut 350 journalist jobs so news broadcasts have become rather thin, and the Treasury is selling some of the redundant analogue TV frequencies, which should bring it a considerable sum.*

Katerina Porter, by email

*I am concerned that there will be a break up of our present system of broadcasting which has served us well for so long.*

*For myself the licence fee is fair and good value but I do not agree that the public purse should support commercial channels – which are not free, since all the costs of advertising are passed on to us at the check out or added to payments we make to banks and power companies.*

*What is laudable about promoting materialism, for the sake of so called choice? It is unethical to promote goods and services from the public purse. A fairer system would be for industry levies to prevail in the commercial sector or for advertising breaks to be longer.*

F Tomlin, by email

### EVENING WITH SECRETARY OF STATE

*A big 'thank-you' for the excellent event with the Culture Secretary. I thought it went very well, that he may be a more PSB-friendly Secretary of State, and that he made a gracious and highly appropriate proposal for more such meetings with VLV.*

Sylvia Harvey, Lincoln

### REGULATING PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING – THE BBC AND OFCOM

*I think public service broadcasting needs to be the domain of one organisation, full time, exclusively. Both dedicated public and commercial broadcasters should work for the highest quality and reliability in public service.*

*The BBC is the world's leading 'brand name' in broadcasting. It requires the support, discipline and freedom to fulfil that role – probably not as a multi-national, commercially-inclined giant, rather a moderately sized practitioner of journalistic excellence broadcasting as a service to its principal stakeholders, the public.*

*Funding for the BBC should come from the licence fee, plus grants or aid from the public purse, plus a tax from commercial broadcasters.*

James Hood, La Bardonnerie, Culan, France

*I remain to be convinced that Channel 4 or any other channel has a special role to play in regard to PSB post-digital switchover, and rather feel that iPlayer, You Tube, Internet TV, podcasting and other initiatives mark the usurping of traditional television broadcasting from its privileged recent position at the top of the media food chain. Prevarication by Ofcom to protect outdated delivery mechanisms will prove a futile and costly mistake. The focus urgently needs to be on protecting the quality and accessibility of Public Service Content, ensuring there is mobility of audiences between different content in imaginative ways, and making available a vibrant and diverse UK cultural offering to the world.*

*What I do recognise, is the huge challenge that all these changes present to the delivery of a plurality of high quality content to the audience. I am delighted to be supporting an organisation which is held in such great esteem and hope that I am able to contribute by supporting your work.*

Andrew Lucas, by email

*Ofcom wants to 'top slice' the licence revenue and hand a dollop to Channel 4, to help it live on in the style to which it has grown accustomed. But who would decide on the size of this slice, and whether or not it might continue or be forfeited?*

*The best way of spending a 'top slice' would be to use it to pay for Ofcom – instead of Ofcom getting its money from those it is supposed to control, while in fact it steadily loosens the reins. This way, the public would expect Ofcom to fight our corner, pressing for quality from the channels which it licences. Ofcom should also devise a regular measure of broadcasting quality and publish the results. It might do well to consider the BBC's own system of Appreciation Measurement for this purpose.*

J.M.Wober PhD, by email

Letters do not necessarily represent the views of the Association and may be shortened for publication.

**Deadline for next issue:  
26 September, 2008**

Write, fax or e-mail your letters to the  
Editor at: [info@vlv.org.uk](mailto:info@vlv.org.uk)

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**Radio Listener's Guide, PO Box 888  
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## Diary Dates

### Thursday, 2nd October

- EGM - 11.30am
  - Presentation of VLV Student Essay Competition 2008 Prizes - 12 noon
  - Launch of the VLV Silver Jubilee Appeal - 12.15 pm
  - Summer Conference - 2-4pm
- Woburn House, Tavistock Square, London WC1

### Tuesday, 21st October

VLV Visit: BBC World Service, London WC2 - 5.30-6.30pm

### Wednesday, 5th November

Children's TV: a glimmer of hope? New Connaught Rooms, Covent Garden, London WC2 - 9.45am-5pm

### Tuesday, 11th November

VLV Visit: BBC, Salford Quay 12 noon

### Wednesday, 26th November

- 25th Annual Autumn Conference - 10.30am-3.30pm
  - VLV Ltd 6th AGM - 4pm-5pm
- The Geological Society, Piccadilly, London W1

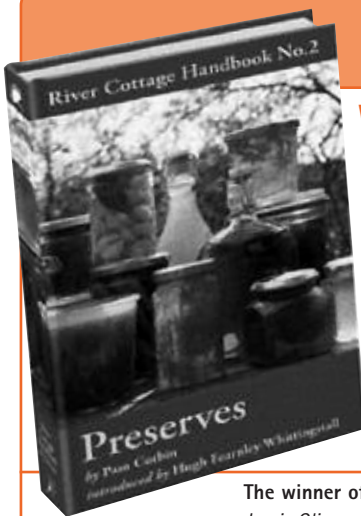
### Tuesday, 9th December

VLV Westminster Seminar with Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP House of Commons, London SW1 6pm - 7.30pm

### VLV's New Postal Address

From 1st September VLV will have a new postal address. Please make a note now to send correspondence in future to VLV Ltd, PO Box 401, Gravesend, DA12 9FY.

The telephone number: 01474 352835 and email address: [info@VLV.org.uk](mailto:info@VLV.org.uk) remain unchanged.



## Summer Competition

**Win the latest River Cottage cookery handbook: Preserves by Pam Corbin with introduction by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall**

Published by Bloomsbury Books @£12.99. ISBN 978 0 7475 9532 8 Preserving is a centuries-old way to make the most out every season, stretching the more bountiful months into the sparser ones. Pam Corbin, the wife of Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, makes the whole process into fun as she explains how to turn Britain's seasonal gluts of fruit, vegetables, flowers and herbs into delicious pickles, preserves and sauces that you can enjoy all the year round.

**Q: On which TV Channel is the River Cottage series shown?**

Replies on a postcard to: Summer Competition, VLV, PO Box 401, Gravesend DA12 9FY or by email to: [info@vlv.org.uk](mailto:info@vlv.org.uk) by 26 September 2008. The Editor's decision is final.

The winner of VLV's spring competition for a copy of *Jamie Oliver at Home - Cook Your Way to the Good Life* was Ken Hawkins of Dereham, Norfolk.



## NEW SUBSCRIPTION / DONATION / CHANGE OF ADDRESS\* (\*please delete as appropriate)

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