



**Voice of the
Listener & Viewer**

Bulletin

Working for Quality and Diversity in Broadcasting

Summer 2007

Issue 89

Trust and Transparency in Broadcasting VLV's 24th Annual Autumn Conference

Thursday, 29 November 10.30am – 3.30pm
Royal National Hotel, Bloomsbury, London WC1



Sir Michael Lyons, Chairman of the BBC Trust will be the keynote morning speaker at VLV's autumn conference in London on 29th November.

Sir Michael will be coming towards the end of his first six months as Chairman of the BBC Trust, which came into being on 1 January. It has been an eventful year for both the Corporation and the Trust and the conference will provide a timely occasion for him to share his views on the work

of the Trust and the division of responsibilities between the Trust and the BBC Executive Board. It will also provide a valuable opportunity for VLV members to question Sir Michael about the warning that the Trust has given Mark Thompson, the BBC Director General, following revelations of malpractice in some BBC programmes earlier this year.

Peter Davies, Ofcom's Director of Radio and New Media, has accepted an invitation to speak in the afternoon. Following Ofcom's consultation on the future of Radio some commercial radio companies are calling for all VHF and AM radio transmissions to be switched off in a few year's time. So we look forward to hearing an up-to-date account of Ofcom's thinking on the future of the medium, including an update on DAB Radio and Digital Radio Mondiale (DRM).

An update on digital switch-over will also be included in the programme as by the end of November, Whitehaven, Cumbria, the first town in the UK to be selected for switch-over, will have completed the change and lost its analogue signals. What lessons have been learnt for the rest of the UK?

With so much change in progress one session is being reserved for last-minute issues which may arise.



Stop Press! 50th Anniversary of the Today Programme

Radio 4's Today Programme will see its 50th anniversary at the end of October and they have suggested VLV and they arrange a joint celebration involving both editorial staff and presenters. The details have yet to be confirmed but an early evening event on or about 31 October is the most likely date. Please let us know if you are interested in attending, and keep the date free. Full details will be published on our website as soon as they are finalised.

An Evening with Michael Parkinson

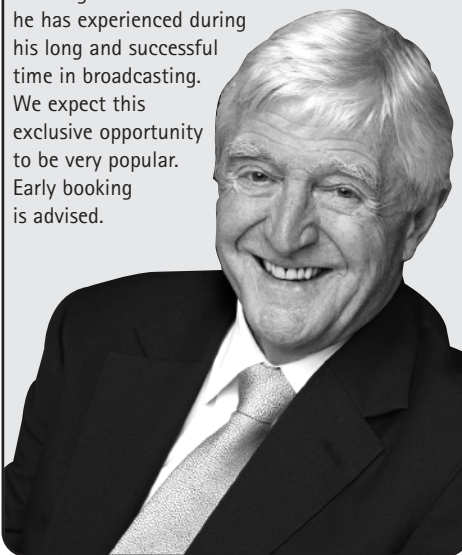
Monday, 15 October 6.30pm – 8.15pm
at the British Academy,
Carlton House Terrace, London SW1

Michael Parkinson, the well-known radio and television chat show host will spend an evening with VLV members and guests on Monday, 15 October. The venue will be the splendid Georgian music room of the British Academy overlooking the Mall in London's West End.

Michael's long and successful career has included more than 35 years in front of the microphone. Part of his success lies in the fact that he always does his homework before interviewing and he seeks guests who are not only well-known, but have a story to tell. His open, relaxed interviewing style has helped to get the best out of more than 2,000 interviewees who range from Muhammed Ali, Bing Crosby and Peter Ustinov to Tony Blair, David Beckham and Rod Hull with his (seemingly) uncontrollable Emu glove puppet.

Michael first established his reputation at the BBC between 1971 and 1982, when he left to be co-founder and presenter on the new commercial station TV-am. He returned to the BBC in 1998 with his eponymous Saturday evening series Parkinson. But moved again in 2004, to ITV, transferring his popular format to their Saturday evening schedule. He recently announced that after the coming 12 week series of Parkinson on ITV this autumn, he intends to retire and write his autobiography.

During the evening he has kindly donated to VLV, Michael will share some of the many amusing interviews and encounters he has experienced during his long and successful time in broadcasting. We expect this exclusive opportunity to be very popular. Early booking is advised.



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Voice of the Listener & Viewer

Working for Quality and Diversity in British Broadcasting

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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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VLV Chairman and Member win European Women of Achievement Awards

Jocelyn Hay and VLV member, Lucy Neville-Rolfe, were the winners this summer of two prestigious awards honouring women who have made a major impact on the European stage.

The European Women of Achievement Awards, now in their 17th year, are organised by the British Section of the European Union of Women. They recognise women from numerous countries in East and West Europe. This year the presentation took place in front of a surprise guest, Sarah Brown. On her first day of official duties as the Prime Minister's wife, she was joined by Baroness Howe of Idlicote. EUW Patron, and 500 top executives from all over Europe. Among them was another VLV member, Councillor Sally Elliott from Dorset. The broadcaster, Angela Rippon, herself a past winner in the Media section, introduced the winners at the ceremony held in the ballroom of the Grosvenor House Hotel, London.

Mrs Hay was the winner in the Humanitarian Category, for her pioneering work with VLV, and for helping to set up the European Alliance of Listeners' & Viewers' Associations (EURALVA), of which she was until last year its first President. She was also honoured for her long standing interest and efforts on behalf of the citizen and consumer in Europe and for promoting cultural diversity and democracy.



Lucy Neville-Rolfe and Jocelyn Hay with their awards

Lucy Neville-Rolfe CMG, a long standing member of VLV, was the winner in the Professional category. She is Executive Director, Corporate & Legal Affairs at Tesco plc which she joined 10 years ago after a very successful career in the Civil Service, including a spell at No.10 Downing Street. She was appointed Company Secretary of Tesco in 2004, joined the Board in 2006 and has helped to make it a leading international company. She has also contributed to the enlargement of the European Union through her work in Brussels and central Europe.

Previous winners of the EWA Awards include Dame Vera Lynn, the athlete Paula Radcliffe, Ellen MacArthur the yachtswoman, and the explorer Fiona Thomas.

VLV Awayday



From L to R (standing): Andrew Taussig, Peter Blackman, Sonia Livingstone, Robert Clark, Robert Beveridge, Sylvia Harvey, John Clarke; (sitting) Ivor Gaber, Michael Barton, Warren Newman, Carol Cattley, Jocelyn Hay

Members of the VLV Board met with the Trustees of the Voice of the Listener Trust in London on 2nd of July for a joint Awayday. They were joined by Peter Blackman, VLV's Executive Director.

Among other things they reviewed the past year, discussed the current position and ways of developing VLV in future. They also considered a range of current external policy issues.

VLV's 5th AGM

The 5th AGM of Voice of the Listener & Viewer Ltd will follow the autumn conference at 4pm on Thursday, 29th November at the Royal National Hotel, Bedford Way, Bloomsbury, London WC1.

Nominations and resolutions should be sent to the Company Secretary at 101 Kings Drive, Gravesend, Kent, DA12 5BQ, no fewer than three days and not more than twenty-one days before the AGM.

Tea will be served between the conference and the AGM.

2007 VLV Student Essay Competition

The entries in VLV's 2007 Student Essay Competition are currently being judged. There are two categories: undergraduate level and post graduate level. The winners in each category will receive £500 in cash, kindly donated by Channel 4, and they and the two runners up will be given the opportunity for two weeks' work experience with a leading independent production company.

Children's Television – a Traumatic Year

Wednesday, 7th November, 9.45am – 5pm at The Royal Society, Carlton House Terrace, London SW1.

2007 has been a traumatic year for children's television in the UK. As ITV can now make more money by broadcasting adult programmes in the afternoons, it has dropped almost all its transmissions of children's programmes. Michael Grade, ITV Chairman said earlier this year that it would be unfair to its shareholders not to do so. Although VLV fought hard to ensure the 2003 Communications Act required ITV to provide a range of original programmes for children, it seems that Ofcom, the regulator, is powerless to enforce it. There is no guarantee even that ITV's very successful dedicated digital children's channel, ITV Kids will continue or commission any new content.

The BBC is doing a great job. Its channel for younger children, CBEEBies is more popular than ever and it has just re-launched its digital channel for older children CBBC. But fears still remain that this year's lower than requested licence fee settlement may prevent the BBC from introducing some of the new and innovative programmes it promised during the Charter Review process.

Channel 4 provides educational programming but has no obligation to provide children's entertainment programmes. Channel Five also



Richard Deverell



Nick Wilson



Rhian Gibson

Children's TV: Has Time Run Out?

Confirmed speakers include:

RICHARD DEVERELL, Controller BBC Children's Programmes

NICK WILSON, Director of Children's Programmes, Five TV

RHIAN GIBSON, Director of Commissioning, S4C

JAMES THICKETT, Director of Ofcom's 2007 Review of Children's Television

bears no obligation to provide children's programming but has nobly increased its spending on pre-school animation programmes made in the UK. Sadly, it has dropped its former Sunday morning strand of innovative programming for boys aged 7 to 12.

VLV and other interested parties are extremely concerned that, while some satellite and cable channels are increasing their currently very small commissioning budgets, they will tend to produce programmes to meet the tastes of their international audiences and not reflect the British environment or culture. And their combined contribution will still represent only a fraction of the investment formerly made by ITV in this important genre.

Part of the problem stems from the competition which the terrestrial channels now face from a score of foreign-owned satellite and cable channels. It has been exacerbated by the loss of revenue caused by the recent ban on the advertising of food products high in fat, sugar and salt.

VLV's is concerned that children who spend many hours watching television programmes need, and have a right to, enjoy content that reflects their own culture and environment, which contributes to their own cultural identity and knowledge. It seems ironic, if not tragic, that although British television

programmes for children are admired and in demand all over the world for their quality and integrity, the dedicated producers who make them are now in peril through lack of support in their own homeland.

VLV Holds High Policy Seminar on HDTV

VLV held one of its High Policy Seminars in London on 9 July to consider some of the issues arising from Ofcom's consultation launched earlier this year. The subject was the use of the analogue spectrum to be released when the UK switches to digital television and known as the Digital Dividend Review or DDR VLV is particularly concerned about the issues surrounding the introduction of High Definition Television on Freeview, the free-to-air digital terrestrial television service. HDTV is currently available only on the subscription service BSkyB, yet Freeview has now overtaken Sky as the most popular delivery platform.

The seminar was attended by some 25 participants, including representatives of the principal broadcasting companies, Department for Culture, Media & Sport, the Treasury, Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, Ofcom, the set manufacturers, independent consultancies, Freeview and VLV Board members.

As stated in VLV's response to the Ofcom consultation, we consider that some of the spectrum that will become spare should be used to enable the introduction of HDTV on the Freeview digital terrestrial platform (DTT). If it is not,

Freeview users will be deprived of the opportunity to benefit from the higher quality pictures that HDTV can deliver. It runs the risks of becoming a second class service. VLV is also worried that many consumers who are currently buying 'HD-ready' television sets do not realise either that they will not be able to receive HD transmissions with the current generation of set top boxes or that unless the broadcasters are allocated extra spectrum, Freeview will not have the capacity to broadcast many programmes in HD. The BBC is understood to be exploring the feasibility of broadcasting some HD programmes during the night but other public service broadcasters also wish to do so.

Philip Rutnam, the Director of the Ofcom DDR consultation was present at the seminar and took note of the points put forward. One of the problems is that the limited amount of spectrum to be released is in demand from many different and diverse interests. They include Local TV, community services, mobile telephony, business data services and other more specialised uses. Ofcom, which has the task of balancing these demands, will be publishing the results of its consultation and its decision during the autumn.

2007 VLV Awards for Excellence in Broadcasting

Please remember to make a note of the programmes you have enjoyed on radio and television this summer so that you can nominate the best for VLV's 2007 Awards for Excellence in Broadcasting. It is sometimes hard to think back over the year unless you have made a note at the time and we want to be sure that all deserving ones are included. Nomination forms will be sent out with the next edition of the Bulletin. These Awards provide you with a unique opportunity to reward the performers and producers whose work you enjoy, and are highly regarded by all the recipients.



One of last year's award winners, Stephen Fry

Editorial Comment – A Disgraceful Episode



Some years ago Michael Grade, working then as now for ITV, remarked that the BBC was needed to keep ITV honest. Others have said that the BBC needs ITV to keep it on its toes. Such sentiments may be true but they've acquired an ironic ring in

recent months as both organisations have been exposed to criticism of fraudulent programme making. Set against the total output of programmes each week the number of actual offences has been relatively small, but nevertheless they've shaken public confidence. And that's extremely damaging.

After the first scandal came to light – in which would-be contestants in an ITV game were encouraged to phone-in on a premium rate line after the voting had closed, a string of guilty pleas from other channels followed. Every one of the terrestrial broadcasters, it seems, was involved in varying degrees of deception, some indistinguishable from fraud. The scale of the willingness to ignore editorial guidelines and to bend rules when pressed, has hugely damaged the trust in broadcasters that formerly prevailed. One of the most shocking episodes involved the BBC's Blue Peter, which substituted a studio guest in the absence of a genuine prize-winner. If perhaps the best-loved and most respected children's programme of all time could deceive, what hope was there for other, more pressured genres? The sense of let-down was unprecedented and so was the humiliation experienced by the Corporation when the external regulator, Ofcom, imposed a fine of £50,000.

Phone-in competitions have since been taken off all the terrestrial channels pending inquiries. One senior ITV executive has resigned, several BBC executives have been suspended, and the BBC Trust, under its new Chairman, has expressed deep concern that such significant failures of control and compliance could have compromised the BBC's traditional values of accuracy and honesty.

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Unfortunately, and potentially even more damaging, the BBC's problems were not confined solely to entertainment but also extended into more serious areas of output. The misediting of a trailer shown to the Press as part of the promotion of a documentary about the Queen, although made by an independent company, was particularly shaming, not least for the apparent insouciance of some of the people involved. Since then, the Controller of BBC News has had to apologise for the use of fourteen-year old shots of the MP John Redwood in another report.

It is easy to say that these difficulties stem from the harsher commercial climate resulting from decisions by past Governments to progressively deregulate broadcasting over the years. Money is tight for independent producers and competition from unregulated satellite and cable channels increasingly intense, while many independents rely for their survival on commissions from a handful of

mainstream broadcasters heavily dependent on successful audience ratings. Add to that the many production staff who are engaged on short-term contracts and desperate to ensure they are renewed, and it's easy to see how a climate has developed in which short cuts are common and no one can afford to risk admitting failure.

Perhaps it's ironic that the problem arises partly because, while the Press has experienced a steady loss of confidence among its readers over the years, the broadcasters have continued to enjoy it more than many other public institutions. That priceless respect and reputation derived from more than 80 years of practice and a public service ethos. Yet in just a few months it has been seriously eroded if not irreparably damaged. And it is damage which goes far beyond the handful of programmes directly involved, reaching right into the heart of the public sphere on which the health of our democratic society so heavily depends.

The concerns expressed by the Chairman of the BBC Trust, the BBC's Director General and the Chief Executives of ITV, Channel 4 and Five are shared by us all. The key issue now, however, is how quickly and effectively they can put in place measures to ensure that all their staff, whether broadcasters, managers or programme-makers, recognise and exercise their responsibilities as public service broadcasters. Only then will it be possible to restore the trust that the public formerly placed in them. That's why we look forward to hearing from the Chairman of the BBC and other senior executives at our Autumn Conference.

Isaiah May



This is the title of a consultation undertaken by Ofcom this summer, to which VLV sent a detailed response. The document appeared to be about the future of commercial radio, which in part was the case. However, behind the reassurances and Ofcom 'speak' the reality is that Ofcom appear to be in favour of closing down broadcasts on the AM and FM (analogue) transmitters by the middle of the next decade – i.e. in seven or eight years' time. These transmitters provide us with the radio signals that most of us tune into at present. But from that date all radio would be broadcast digitally. Ofcom has based this plan on the assumption that there will be a rapid switch away from analogue radio to

The Future of Radio

digital and other platforms. Yet in the 13 years since DAB radio was first launched by the BBC only six million DAB sets have been sold, with more than 50 million analogue sets still in use.

VLV is unable to support the basic assumption of this consultation because Ofcom appears to assume that the switch-off of analogue radio services in the foreseeable future is both inevitable and in the public interest. We consider that it is premature to be planning for the switch-off of the present radio analogue services. The exercise appears to be driven by: Ofcom's time table for the renewal of commercial radio licences, a desire to free up spectrum for sale, and the interests of the commercial sector. Some of the larger commercial companies, having at first eagerly bought up digital licences, have since suffered a serious loss of listeners from their analogue channels and now complain that they are unable to finance duplicate broadcasts of some digital and analogue channels. Other smaller stations however, are happy to continue broadcasting in analogue.

VLV believes that this consultation ignores the needs and wishes of listeners and consumers. It also fails to consider the impact of analogue switch-off on

BBC radio. If these proposals are implemented, the radio output of the UK's major public service broadcaster, with a loyal audience representing more than 50% of all radio listeners, will be confined to a platform which is currently a minority choice, and which may never achieve universal or even near-universal coverage. It is widely accepted that digital radio transmission will never have the same near universal coverage as analogue.

The consultation also failed to take into account the presence of the many analogue radios currently in use in homes across the UK. Ofcom's own research indicates that on average there are between 3 and 4 radios per household and that 13% of households have 5 or more. VLV considers it is far too soon to assume that listeners will abandon this equipment. It is important to remember that, unlike television, listeners will need to buy new receivers in order to enjoy digital services, they will not be able to adapt existing sets with the aid of a cheap set top box. While many listeners are now enjoying new digital radio stations via their television sets, they cannot then take advantage of one of radio's main benefits, its portability.



Guest Contributor, Liz Cleaver, Controller BBC Learning

In our Spring bulletin, Lord Puttnam outlined the events leading up to the suspension of the BBC's school curriculum service, BBC Jam, and reminded the Corporation of its Charter obligation to promote education and learning. But while the BBC ponders the evolving shape of its formal learning offering post-Jam, BBC Learning Controller LIZ CLEAVER says that the BBC's commitment to helping people fulfil their potential through a range of learning activity is stronger than ever.

As all VLV members will know, the BBC's commitment to learning and education goes back a long way – more than 80 years in fact. That commitment remains as strong as ever today: it is a key part of achieving the BBC's knowledge-building purpose.

But how we deliver it has changed – and continues to change – to meet the circumstances of the 21st century. In particular the spread of broadband internet access and new mobile technology enable us to reach large numbers of people in ways that could not have been imagined in the past. And new social and economic priorities compel us to rethink what we do and how we do it.

I believe our approaches have become more creative, more inclusive, more ambitious, more targeted on individual learners. Take, for example, BBC Blast, which encourages teenagers to develop their skills in areas such as art, dance, film, music, writing and digital creativity. Complete with an interactive website allowing young people to demonstrate and share their ideas – bbc.co.uk/blast – and outlets on national and local radio and television, the project has reached nearly half a million teenagers in widely differing communities across the UK over the past four

years. The Blast truck, equipped with state-of-the-art technology, is touring the country for 30 weeks this year. And this year too, Blast has been complemented by a joint BBC Learning/CBBC digital literacy project for younger children, Me and My Movie, which aims to inspire children to become junior film-makers.

Another example is BBC RaW, our biggest ever literacy campaign, targeting the estimated 12 million adults with reading and writing skills below GCSE level. We have aimed to motivate people through their interests (whether football or TV soaps), through links on TV, through games and features on the interactive website – bbc.co.uk/raw – and through a vast range of activity with partner organisations across the country. We are currently focusing on learners as parents and this autumn are running Family Story Festivals in Plymouth, Cardiff, Birmingham, Portsmouth, Norwich, Liverpool, London and Sunderland. Our longer term plan on adult skills is to develop a broader interactive offering covering literacy, numeracy, ICT and communication skills.

Then there is Breathing Places – on the face of it, quite different, but yet with the same underlying principle of engaging people in their communities and working with partners to encourage learning through participation. This is a long-running environmental project, linked to the BBC's natural history programming and designed to encourage adults and children to create and care for local green spaces. In the summer, we launched a year of 'wild action' in 15 UK cities and this autumn as Autumnwatch

returns to BBC Two, we will be running tree-planting events in the cities, while there will be further Breathing Places activity linked to the landmark BBC One series, The Nature of Britain. There is more information at bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces

We are also working with secondary schools to provide resources on relationships and teenage pregnancy linked to the return of The Baby Borrowers series on BBC Three. Another multi-media health education campaign targeting young people starts with Stephen Fry documentaries on BBC Two, HIV and Me, in October.

That is just a flavour of current activity – without even mentioning ongoing offerings such as Bitesize, Languages, Computer Tutor, Learning Zone Broadband. But do go to the website – bbc.co.uk/learning – to find out more on how we encourage participation in the widest sense.

Activity at a BBC Breathing Places summer event



Sale of BBC Resources

The BBC has just invited tenders for the sale of BBC Resources, the division which is responsible for managing and maintaining all the technical services on which the BBC's programme making depends.

A BBC spokesman has said that Resources now needs a large amount of investment which the BBC cannot afford. However, the sale of such important services and the destruction of the long in-house tradition setting high standards in all areas has been highly criticised by many of its staff and other individuals concerned to see that those standards are maintained.

The sale will include the BBC's studios, Post Production Units in London, Bristol and Birmingham as well as outside broadcast vehicles which are used to broadcast a wide range of events from sporting fixtures to the Proms and Songs of Praise, from natural and other disasters to celebrations like the Queen's Jubilee.

Competition Commission Inquiry into Macquarie/National Grid Wireless Merger

The Competition Commission is inviting evidence from interested parties about the completed acquisition by Macquarie UK Broadcast Ventures Limited of National Grid Wireless Group. The merger brings together the only two broadcast transmission companies in the UK. VLV members may remember that the two transmission networks, originally owned by the former Independent Broadcasting Authority and the BBC, were privatised in the 90's in order to provide competition in the market.

The Competition Commission has been asked to decide whether the merger may be expected to result in a substantial lessening of competition within any market or markets in the UK, including the supply of terrestrial transmission services to radio and television broadcasters, multiplex operators and wireless telecommunications operators.

The Commission will report by 22 January 2008. Submissions should be sent to it by 10 September. Please contact Ethan Tucker, Inquiry Secretary (Macquarie/National Grid Wireless) Competition Commission, Victoria House, Southampton Row, London WC1B 4AD or email: ethan.tucker@cc.gsi.gov.uk

PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS & VLV RESPONSES

VLV has responded to the following recent consultations:

- Ofcom on the Future of Radio (see page 4), June.
- Ofcom on Market Impact Assessment on BBCV HDTV Proposals, June.
- S4C on new Welsh language public service TV channel for children up to 16, July.
- BBC Trust, public value test of BBC Executive's proposals for HDTV.

The Following Public Consultations are still open:

- **20 June:** Ofcom on Programme making & Special Events, by 31 August.
Contact: ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/pmse
- **27 June:** House of Lords Select Committee inquiry into media ownership and the News, by 3 September.
Contact: parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/hlcommunications.cf
- **9 July:** Ofcom on New News, Future News.
Contact: ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/sibc
- **9 July:** Ofcom proposals for broadcasting sanctions, procedures & an addendum to its New News, Future News discussion document, by 7 September.
Contact: ofcom.org.uk/research/tv/reports/newnews
- **12 July:** Ofcom proposals to extend market mechanisms to improve how spectrum is managed & used.
Contact: ofcom.org.uk/consult/condocs/sfrps

MEETINGS & EVENTS

These are some of the many meetings and events at which VLV representatives have spoken or attended over the summer:

Evening seminar in House of Commons on preventing digital exclusion with Minister for Creative Industries; Broadcast magazine conference on the Digital Channels; West Malling Active Retirement Association; BBC Annual Meeting; Social Market Foundation seminar on children's Television; Meopham Ladies' Luncheon Club; Westminster Media Forum seminar on HDTV; National Audit Office; DCMS Consumer Expert Group; Ofcom presentations on Radio and Consumer issues; BBC Trust on BBC online services; National Audit Office on value for money in digital switch-over.

There has been coverage of VLV on BBC Radio 4, BBC News 24, Three Counties Radio and Five Live and articles about the organisation have appeared in the Independent and The Townswoman.

A Broadcasting Commission for Scotland

The First Minister for Scotland, Alex Salmond, announced on 8 August that he is to establish a Scottish Broadcasting Commission to look into the future of the creative industries in Scotland. The Commission will be chaired by Blair Jenkins, former Head of News and Current Affairs at BBC Scotland.

Under the Scotland Act, which brought about devolution, the regulation of broadcasting remains a power reserved to Westminster. The Scottish Parliament, however, has powers over employment, language, education and cultural policy, all of which overlap in different ways with broadcasting and the creative industries.

VLV welcomed the setting up of the Commission

and will be glad to co-operate with its members in promoting public participation and discussion about the future of public service broadcasting and the creative industries in Scotland. The Commission will submit its report in the spring of 2008 and we look forward to hearing more about its agenda and timetable before formulating our submission. In the meantime, we would be glad to hear the views of VLV members so that we can take these into account when we are preparing it.

For more information write to: Blair Jenkins, St Andrew's House, Edinburgh EH1 3DG; or call The Scottish Parliament on 0131 348 5000 or visit www.scotland.gov.uk

The Help Scheme for Digital Switchover

The switch off of the analogue TV signal between 2007 and 2012 has led to the need to ensure that the elderly and disabled are able to cope with the necessary changes so that they continue to receive television programmes. The government has devised the Digital Switchover Help Scheme with the intention of ensuring that those members of the population who are particularly dependent on television will still be able to receive it. The scheme is being tested this autumn as part of the first stage of switchover in Whitehaven and the BBC is now well advanced with selecting a contractor to implement the scheme nationally.

The scheme will be available to households where one person is over 75, or has a significant disability - that is, who is in receipt of attendance allowance or disability living allowance, or is registered blind or partially sighted. These groups of people will be eligible to receive equipment to convert one TV set to digital, help with its installation (including any aerial work) and follow-up support. They will be required to pay a subsidised fee of £40 which will be waived for those in receipt of income support. There is no need for anyone to apply for help as those eligible will be contacted by the relevant authorities several months before switchover starts in each region.

Between seven and eight million households may be eligible. The numbers in each category are: those aged over 75 - 4.6 million; disabled - nearly 3 million, and blind or partially sighted people - 378,000. As there is some overlap in these

categories, the actual total is not certain. Also, given the importance of television to these groups, many will have already converted or will convert before switchover starts in their region, which could significantly reduce the numbers involved.

The implementation of the scheme has been controversial. The need to help people in these groups is supported by VLV. However, we are concerned that the government has ring-fenced £600 million in the BBC licence fee settlement to meet the cost of financing the scheme over the next five years, plus a further £200 million to publicise the process of digital switch-over. Moreover, the Government considers that it is part of the BBC's role to lead the switch to digital. While VLV agrees that the BBC should play a leading part, as it always has done with the introduction of new technologies, it does not agree that the BBC should bear responsibility for the success of the project. Nor do we agree that licence fee payers should bear almost all the costs of helping 'vulnerable' viewers to make the switch to digital. Desirable as the policy is, this involves the BBC in implementing Government social policy. Responsibility for the overall success of the scheme, therefore, should rest with a Government Department such as Work and Pensions, not with the BBC. And the costs should be met out of general taxation or from the money that the Government will eventually raise from the sale of redundant analogue spectrum.

When purchasing digital equipment look for the logo



Who's Who in Government Broadcasting Circles

Following the change of Prime Ministers and the Government re-shuffle there are new Ministers at the Department for Culture, Media & Sport.

The Rt Hon James Purnell is Secretary of State and takes particular responsibility for broadcasting, the creative economy, BBC Charter Review and digital switch-over.

The Rt Hon Margaret Hodge is Minister of State and takes particular responsibility for the arts, creative industries, heritage and tourism.

The Rt Hon Tessa Jowell is Minister for the Olympics and London.

Jerry Sutcliffe is Minister for Sport with responsibility also for gambling and the National Lottery.

For the Opposition, Jeremy Hunt is Conservative Shadow Secretary of State for the Creative Industries; Ed Vaizey Shadow Minister for the Arts; Hugh Roberts for Sport and the Olympics; and Tobias Ellwood for Tourism and Gambling.

Don Foster is Shadow Secretary of State for the Liberal Democrats.

Jonathan Stephens is Permanent Secretary at the DCMS; Andrew Ramsay is Director General of its Creative, Culture and Economy Division.

Letters to the Editor

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

THE BBC TRUST

The editorial in the Spring Bulletin chimed with my own thoughts. The future of public service broadcasting in general, and the BBC in particular, seems daily to be under increasing threat. After hearing 'Feedback' on 1 June, which included an interview with a member of the BBC Trust, I believe that the Trust has been put in place in order to curb the activities of the Corporation in the interest of the commercial sector and that its function, together with its power to sack the Director General and an inadequate licence fee settlement, will severely damage the BBC.

It should be remembered that the BBC entered the commercial field at the instruction of Government in the early 1990s – and not of its own volition. Among the Trust's first decisions was the suspension of the online learning site, BBC Jam. It cannot be said that the suspension of a successful service funded by the licence fee is safeguarding the interest of the licence fee payers: rather, it is wasting licence fee payer's money. It is clear to me that the BBC is under daily increasing threat from commercial interests and from the government, whose policy is to support business interests above all others.

It is worth noting the Greg Dyke (former Director General) said on a recent edition of Desert Island Discs that he had been told, after he left the BBC, that he had made the mistake of believing that the BBC was independent when it was only partially independent.

Joan Darwent, Sheffield

Ofcom's draft Annual Plan for 2007 apparently suggests that people's expectations of regulation are likely to change towards a greater role for self-regulation, and that 'society' may decide that less formal regulation is needed to protect audiences from harm and offence caused by different forms of content (as technology is enabling people to exert greater control over the content they view). A new priority will be to 'review our approach to the rules which restrict what can be shown on TV'. There is no reference to improving standards or taking into account research by Ofcom themselves which appears to show that the majority consider there's too much unnecessary violence and swearing on TV. Recent events hardly support the BBC role in the new Charter 'to sustain citizenship and civil society'.

T B Clark, Harrogate

I feel strongly that VLV's conference on 7th November requires an emergency debate in view of the BBC's present crisis, so as to steady the present leadership and recall the principles of quality broadcasting, based on the BBC's licence fee funding and the freedom it should give the Corporation. 'They make money, we make programmes' as the BBC used to affirm.

The Trustees, I feel, performed in the crisis so woefully, with the Chairman remaining in the Antipodes, that it only enhances the need for VLV to recall the BBC's publicly funded mission of 'quality in broadcasting'.

Indeed, it would be very valuable for all members to hear our chairman's considered views on all these matters. I hope other members will also sense that we cannot have the Children's Conference, however worthy, on 7th November without a wider debate.

Richard Wigg, London

Editor's note: We agree, and we are pleased that the Chairman of the BBC Trust has accepted an invitation to speak and answer members' questions on the role and policies of the Trust. VLV Chairman's views are expressed in the editorial on page 4.

The refusal of the BBC to publish the findings of the Balen Report on its reporting of the Israel/Arab conflict is quite unacceptable. Like everything the BBC does, this report will have been paid for by the licence payer. It is therefore shocking that the BBC is not only refusing to publish, but is prepared to take expensive legal action to prevent its publication. This is virtually an admission of guilt that it is distorting the news in this area. Having some specialist knowledge of the issue I am well aware of many of its distortions. I believed that if it was biased in one area it was highly likely that it would be biased in areas where I had no specialised knowledge.

Apparently my suspicions were correct as a number of recent publications have confirmed. A number of VLV members will no doubt have read the article by Gerard Baker in The Times entitled 'Great Capital City. Shame about the awful BBC'. In it he emphasises the biases of the BBC... The article quotes another article in the New York Times entitled 'The Biased Broadcasting Corporation', which points out that much of the BBC's Arabic language broadcasting is distinctly anti-Western. This is becoming such a scandal that surely VLV should start dealing with this problem.

David Jacobs, St Albans, Herts

Editor's note: VLV cannot handle complaints of this kind, but members will be able to put them to the Chairman of the BBC Trust on 29 November at the VLV Autumn Conference.

In Memoriam

We are very sad to report the death of Mrs Wendy Doncaster of Stockport and send our condolences and deepest sympathy to her husband Stephen. We record with gratitude the donation he has sent to VLV in her memory.

Mr and Mrs Doncaster joined VLV some years ago when they were living in the Peak District and kindly invited Mrs Hay to speak to a meeting of the Buxton Society. She spent a couple of days with them and, as Mr Doncaster says, they developed a strong comradeship with her. It was her first visit to the Peak District and she remembers with great pleasure their warm hospitality, a very receptive audience and the glorious views from her bedroom.

RADIO'S APPEAL

What a superb line-up of programmes on Radio 4 this morning – I was hooked. From Excess Baggage to The Now Show (a spot-on edition!) every programme more than fulfilled its brief. And in the middle was a rather touching documentary about Elvis Presley which I was going to switch off but didn't. Please keep this floating strand in the middle of the schedule, it is an interesting mix.

This is what I pay my licence fee for – the BBC at its varied and informed best. I think everyone must keep their heads in the middle of the latest furore – as long as the level of output remains this high the Corporation will survive.

Anthony Wills, London NW3

I have just won a small prize from a Premium Bond and would like to send it to VLV as a donation to your current appeal to promote public service in broadcasting.

My thanks, as a radio listener, for all your wonderful work.

Jill Hyem, London W14

Editor's note: Our congratulations and our thanks to Ms Hyem.

Please note – our support is for Radio 4 – long may it survive. We tried to join via VLV's website but found it is not very user friendly for membership applicants.

Mr and Mrs Gosney, Balcombe, W Sussex

Editor's Note: We are in the process of reviewing our website and hope to have it updated shortly.

Deadline for next issue:

1 October, 2007

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

Russia Cuts off BBC World Service

The BBC World Service has contracts with local stations in many overseas countries which re-broadcast its programmes in FM to many millions of listeners. Russia is one where they have proved very popular. This summer, however, the Moscow station Bolshoye Radio dropped BBC output from its schedule and the head of the BBC's Russian service is in Moscow to get the decision reversed. BBC Russian programmes continue to be broadcast on medium wave and to be audio streamed online at bbcussian.com



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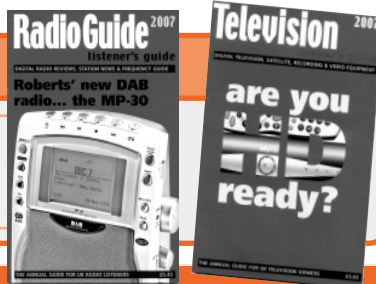
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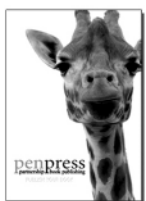
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Summer Competition

Great British Journeys, by Nicholas Crane, published by Weidenfeld and Nicholson @ £20

This companion to the television series currently being broadcast on BBC 2 has been written by Nicholas Crane, its presenter. In the series of eight programmes Nicholas follows the trails of early travellers who criss-crossed the country and left a series of riveting tales of their experiences and discoveries. They travelled between the years 1180 and the 1930's, covering England, Wales and Scotland using a variety of modes of transport.

Name two of the travellers followed on the series.
On which night is the series being broadcast?

Replies on a postcard to: Summer Competition, VLV, 101 King's Drive, Gravesend, DA12 5BQ. Or by email to: info@vlv.org.uk by 1 October 2007. The Editor's decision is final.

The winner of the competition in the Spring Bulletin, who received Andrew Marr's A History of Modern Britain, was Mrs E Self of Welling, Kent.



Diary Dates

Monday, 15 October

An Evening with Michael Parkinson
British Academy, 10 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1 6.30pm - 8pm

Wednesday, 31 October

A Celebration of Radio 4's Today Programme
London, date and details tbc

Wednesday, 7 November

VLV's 13th annual conference on Children and Television
The Royal Society, 6 - 9 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1 9.45am - 5pm

Thursday, 29 November

Truth & Transparency in Broadcasting - VLV's 24th Annual Autumn Conference
The Royal National Hotel Bloomsbury, London WC1 10.30am - 3.30pm

Thursday, 29 November

VLV Ltd 5th AGM
The Royal National Hotel Bloomsbury, London WC1 4pm

Do You Have Memories to Share?

The BBC has set up a website - BBC Memoryshare - to which anyone who would like to share memories from 1900 onwards is invited to contribute.

Why not share some of your past experiences and maybe spur others to send their reminiscences too? Your local library will help you if you do not have access to the internet at home. Send to www.bbc.co.uk/southyorkshire



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