

## **JULY BULLETIN 2017**

### **BBC Board**

The BBC's unitary Board has been in place since April under the new regulatory and governance model. The board is made up of 8 non-executive directors and 4 members of the BBC Executive. The BBC is still looking to appoint non-executive directors for Northern Ireland and Wales. The full list of board members can be read [here](#). VLV will be meeting the Chair of the Board, Sir David Clementi, in the near future.

### **Citizens Forum for Broadcasting**

VLV is concerned that under the new governance and regulatory model which has been instituted by the 2016 Charter, there will be less engagement with licence fee payers than there was previously under the BBC Trust model. The BBC has briefly explained how it plans to engage with audiences in its Annual Plan and Ofcom is consulting on how it should assess BBC performance through audience research, but these combined proposals do not include significant engagement with audiences. It appears to VLV that an accountability gap has developed whereby the interests of citizens and audiences may be marginalised. In response to this concern, VLV is developing a proposal for a new forum to represent the interests of citizens in public service broadcasting to feed into Ofcom policy deliberations and engage with the BBC and other PSBs.

### **BBC Annual Plan 2017/18**

The BBC's first Annual Plan under the new system was published on 4 July. It is a wide-ranging document which sets out the BBC's creative vision for the coming year and a three year strategy. You can read the full document [here](#).

The focus of the strategy is on increasing the BBC's impact via digital platforms so that it is fit for the internet age. It makes increased commitments to production in and for the nations and regions, a significant £34m increased investment in children's content over three years and highlights plans over the coming year to boost science, art and history programmes. It also explains the important role BBC News is playing in addressing fake news with an expansion to its *Reality Check* programme and increased engagement with Facebook.

The Annual Plan includes a strategy for the coming three years which is focused on five objectives. They are to ensure the BBC caters for audiences who view the BBC

the least, providing world class content and services, extending the global reach of the BBC, making the BBC a great place to work and ensuring financial stability for the BBC. It includes details of how the BBC will engage with licence fee payers which VLV is concerned may not go far enough when viewed in combination with Ofcom's plans and will lead to an engagement gap.

## Sign in for BBC online

The BBC is now requiring users of its online platforms to sign in to watch and listen to TV and radio content. This means users have to create an account with a password. The BBC says it is putting this new system in place so that it can better provide for audiences because it will have more data on what people are watching. They will also be able to personalise what you see – making sure they promote content which reflects your interests, based on your previous viewing history. It is worth noting, however, that you don't have to opt in to personalisation - you can choose to not have content 'personalised'. You won't have to sign in every time you visit BBC iPlayer as you should stay signed in for two years on each web browser or app. Sign in isn't required to watch children's content through your web browser. More information on signing in is available [here](#).

## Changes at the top of Channel 4

Following the announcement in March this year that David Abraham had decided to stand down as CEO of Channel 4, the broadcaster has appointed Alex Mahon as its new CEO. Alex was the former CEO of the Shine Group, maker of MasterChef and Broadchurch, who now runs the special effects firm Foundry is expected to join Channel 4 in October or November. She is the first female Channel 4 chief executive in the broadcaster's 35-year history. Channel 4 is also searching for a new chief creative officer following the resignation of Jay Hunt in June who was widely rumoured to be one of the front runners for the CEO role. She is due to leave at the end of September.

## Culture, Media and Sport in Westminster

Following the snap election in June, Karen Bradley has been reappointed as Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. The department has, however, been renamed to include digital so it is now called the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DDCMS) reflecting the increasing importance of the internet in our lives.

The Lords Communications Committee announced its new membership late in June, with Lord Henley taking over the role of chairman from Lord Best. Lord Henley's recent government roles include Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the

Department for Environment, Minister of State at the Home Office and one of the government whips in the Lords. The full list of committee members can be found [here](#).

As we write this it has recently been announced the only nominee for the Chair of the Culture Media and Sport Committee, Damian Collins, has been elected unopposed to lead the Committee for another term. Damian spoke at the VLV conference in April this year and covered a wide range of topics with great expertise.

## Children's TV given a boost

The Digital Economy Act which was passed at the end of the last Parliament has given Ofcom a new responsibility to impose criteria concerning the provision of children's programmes on Public Service Broadcasters (BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5). This legal change is designed to make broadcasters negotiate an appropriate settlement for children with Ofcom, with a view to increasing the amount of new, home-grown content broadcast to children. VLV along with supporters of children's TV in the UK welcomed this move which is something we have supported ever since children's programming was downgraded to a Tier 3 requirement in the 2003 Communications Act. Ofcom will be consulting on how to carry out its responsibilities later in the Summer. It is keen to hear from audiences, so we will let you know when the consultation is open and encourage you to participate.

## VLV Strategy 2017-2022

VLV Trustees have developed a strategy for the organisation for the coming five years to ensure that citizen interests are represented in the debate about public service broadcasting. The strategy focuses on four key goals: to ensure that high quality broadcasting services which are free once the TV Licence Fee has been paid are maintained and supported; to hold the UK's public service broadcasters to account; to monitor the delivery of public service content; to ensure that citizen interests are represented in the policy debate around broadcasting. A short version of the strategy is available [here](#) on the VLV website. In future VLV plans to distribute print versions of its bulletin twice a year and to supplement these with three bulletins which will be emailed to members. Those members who have not provided us with an email address will have the option of receiving copies of the e-bulletins by post.

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## Consultations

Since April VLV has been busy drafting consultations the outcomes of which will have significant impact on the PSB landscape.

The DCMS has been consulting on Channel 4 regional impact. VLV canvassed its members and we are grateful to those who responded to our call for input. Having considered our members' views, VLV has opposed moving the Channel 4 HQ out of London but agrees that out of London quotas should be raised to reflect existing delivery of this quota. VLV believes it is crucial that Channel 4 reflects life in the nations and regions and ensures it does all it can to support independents from across the UK, so we have encouraged Channel 4 to become more engaged with producers in the nations and regions, possibly by having a greater presence outside London.

Ofcom has been consulting on its draft BBC Operating Licence and Performance Measurement Framework and VLV is poised to send in its response. We broadly support the proposed Operating Licence although we are concerned by a few elements:

- That the quotas for drama on Radio 3 and 4 have been removed along with the quota for comedy on Radio 4
- That new quotas for the volume of new UK originated content may undermine the BBC's existing strategy to provide high quality, high cost series (the 'Bigger, Better, Fewer' strategy) such as Planet Earth II which won the VLV award for Best News and Factual Programme this year.
- That new quotas for the volume of content from the nations, alongside existing quotas which require a specific level of spend in the nations, might undermine the BBC's successful strategy in recent years to develop creative hubs in the nations. Northern Ireland and Wales especially have excelled in drama which is low volume and high cost. This proposed change could mean these hubs are forced to drop this approach and produce low cost high volume series to fulfil the new quota which VLV would see as detrimental.

Ofcom is also consulting on its technical analysis of the coexistence of new services in the 700 MHz band with digital terrestrial television. This consultation outlines potential issues between future mobile services in the 700 MHz band and digital terrestrial television (DTT) in the adjacent band. The 700 MHz spectrum band currently houses DTT and wireless microphones used for programme making and special events (PMSE). In November 2014, Ofcom announced that this spectrum band would be repurposed for mobile data services. VLV has made a submission highlighting impacts of this policy on DTT audiences and proposing that none of the costs which may be required to retune domestic appliances should be borne by the public but should be covered by the mobile operators who will benefit from this change.

The BBC is conducting its first public consultation following the institution of the new regulation and governance model. The consultation is a Public Interest Test consultation on the proposed TV channel for Scotland which was announced in

February this year. As the new channel represents a material change to the BBC's UK Public Services, the BBC has to conduct a Public Interest Test of the proposal. The consultation is open to all, but the BBC is particularly interested in views from industry stakeholders and other interested parties with activities in Scotland. It closes on 25 July.

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## **Diary Dates**

**VLV Autumn Conference 2017 – 10.30am – 3.30pm 29<sup>th</sup> November 2017, Geological Society, London W1. VLV AGM 4.00pm – 4.45pm.**

**VLV Spring Conference 2018 – 10.30am – 4.00pm 19<sup>th</sup> April 2018, Geological Society, London W1. Members' Forum 4.15 – 5.00pm.**