

CHILDREN'S TELEVISION IN THE SPOTLIGHT



It's going to be an exciting year for children's content policy in the UK. Ofcom has new powers to scrutinise the provision of children's programming on commercial PSBs (ITV, Channel Four and Five) and their portfolio of services. If it's considered necessary, Ofcom has the power to impose quotas on the commercial PSBs to make them broadcast more children's content. Also the DCMS has announced that the government wants the £60m Contestable Fund to focus on children's programmes for broadcast platforms.

After many years of being unable to intervene in halting the decline of children's content on commercial PSBs, Ofcom now has the powers to make a difference. However, there is a real risk that the underlying principles in the public service purposes will be overridden by commercial considerations and a lack of incentive by commercial PSBs to invest in or broadcast children's content.

In its submission to the recent Ofcom Review of children's content VLV proposed that there should be new conditions in the commercial PSB's licences. From VLV's perspective, the main argument for having children's content on mainstream free to air TV platforms is a civic one related to issues of cultural identity and diversity, including access to information and knowledge. All of these are reflected in PSB Purposes and Characteristics, which reflect the type of environment we might wish our children to grow up in, echoing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that all children should have access to content that reflects their diverse lives, providing the "prerequisites to children's participation in society" (United Nations, 1989, Article 17).

However, children's content is problematic in the market place. It's long been acknowledged as a market failure "genre" especially in UK-specific drama, news and information, which don't perform in international markets. Without interventions, such as quotas, current and future generations of British children are likely to grow up without the wide range of diverse TV content that today's adults enjoyed when they were children. *(continued on page 2)*

VLV's 35th ANNUAL SPRING CONFERENCE Thursday 19th April 2018

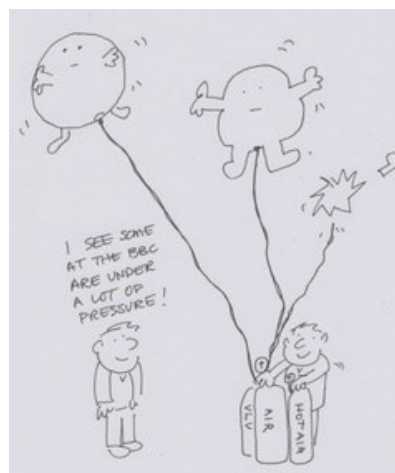
Challenges for public service broadcasting in a digital age

*The Geological Society, Piccadilly, London W1J 0BG
10.30 am - 4.00 pm*



Sir David Clementi, Chairman of the BBC, will be our keynote speaker on the morning of the VLV Spring Conference 2018. After just over one year in his new role, Sir David will be able to update us on how the new governance and regulatory model is bedding in and how he sees the future for the BBC.

Other sessions on the day will include a panel on the contribution of commercial radio. After lunch broadcaster Jon Snow will present the popular VLV Awards for Excellence in Broadcasting 2017. To book a ticket complete the enclosed form or go to www.vlv.org.uk.



Many thanks to VLV member Albert Barber for this cartoon, inspired by the VLV Autumn 2017 Conference



Voice of the Listener & Viewer

Championing Excellence and Diversity in Broadcasting

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FROM THE CHAIRMAN, COLIN BROWNE



The contents of this Bulletin illustrate graphically the wide range of issues faced by broadcasters, and consumers, in the rapidly developing and changing media world.

Trusted and reliable news services, content for children's television and coverage of international developments all have important implications for civil society in the UK. However, while content may be king, distribution really matters too and the availability of spectrum for broadcasting is a key element in the mix. You can read more about all these issues elsewhere in this Bulletin and we are grateful to all the contributors.

VLV's role is to continue to press broadcasters, regulators and Government to ensure that a broad range of quality programming, in all the major genres, is available to UK audiences on a universal basis, free at the point of reception. We also believe that it is vital for the broadcasters to engage in a meaningful way with their listeners and viewers. This is particularly important in the case of the licence-fee funded BBC and we await with growing impatience more detail of the BBC's plans for stakeholder engagement in the new Charter period.

We recognise the financial challenges faced by the public service broadcasters. The last BBC licence fee was, to say the least, less than generous, while ITV, Channel 5 and in particular Channel 4 have faced a difficult advertising market. Despite all these challenges, the UK continues to enjoy much outstanding television and radio, as illustrated by the nominations for the VLV annual awards. Do please return your voting forms and I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible on 19 April.

This is the first Bulletin to be produced since Dinah Garrett stood down as a Trustee. Dinah has latterly served as editor of the Bulletin as well as producing our conferences. I would like to thank her for her immense contribution over many years.

Finally, I would like to record our sadness at the death of Robert Clark, who served as our secretary for a number of years. He was a dedicated Trustee, particularly devoted to radio. We will miss him greatly and send our sympathy to Susan.

(continued from page 1)

The other complicating factor is data about children's consumption of media. Children still watch a great deal of television on a TV set - between 13.5 and 15 hours a week for different age groups according to Ofcom. They also spend a lot of time online (up to 21 hours a week for older children), however we know very little about what they are watching online and how much of it is public service content. Making a policy decision on the basis of children watching less TV on a TV set is flawed because we do not know how much and what they are watching on other devices and platforms.

The implicit suggestion in the consultation is that stakeholders need to make a strong case for intervention based on statistics and audience demand, but you have to ask the right questions and this is not happening. No questions are being asked to provide insight into the inherent value for society of well-made UK children's content and that value goes beyond what can be quantified in market terms. The inherent value, arguably, lies in providing children with properly regulated and curated content on a variety of platforms that allows them to see their own lives and culture reflected on screen. This is all the more important in the context of online provision by YouTube and others that is not regulated for accuracy, harm or offence and which generates considerable concern for parents and unease or even distress amongst children. If children are to get anything tangible from this Review, there needs to be a recognition that children's needs must come first and that public service broadcasters have obligations.

By Professor Jeanette Steemers, VLV Trustee and Professor of Culture, Media and Creative Industries, King's College London

THE MURDOCH-DISNEY BUY-OUT: WHAT CONSEQUENCES FOR BRITISH VIEWERS?

Professor Sylvia Harvey, Visiting Professor in Communications Studies, Leeds University and VLV Trustee



In December 2017 it was confirmed that Rupert Murdoch is selling a substantial part of his 21st Century Fox media empire (including the 39 per cent of Sky that he already owns) to Disney. This raises some difficult questions both for the British Competition & Markets Authority and for UK audiences. It is uncertain whether Murdoch's Fox group will be allowed by the British CMA to purchase the remaining 61% of Sky. But what does now seem certain is that the British Sky satellite services will in future be owned in part or in whole by Disney. It will be down to the US competition authorities to decide on whether Disney's related acquisitions in the US are anti-competitive and could limit consumer choice there.

In America Disney looks set to take over Fox Studios - with its well-known brands of the early *Star Wars* movies, *Avatar* and *The Simpsons* - along with parts of the Fox television network (but not Fox News) and the online movie and TV provider Hulu. Mergers and acquisitions are the order of the day. Disney's purchase of the Fox/Murdoch entertainment assets in the UK, the US, Latin America and India, with a price tag of \$52 billion looks big. But the proposed AT & T takeover of Time Warner in the US at a cost of \$85 billion is even bigger. As a major communications infrastructure company AT & T seeks to take over a very big content provider (Warner) and the US Justice Department has already filed an anti-competitive suit seeking to stop the deal. The clash of US titans is getting closer to UK shores, UK regulatory institutions and audiences.

One of the factors driving the new wave of consolidation in both the US and the UK is the emergence of the new and increasingly popular subscription video on demand services such as Netflix and Amazon. These largely advertising free, online services are putting the old broadcasters under pressure especially in the US where some of the over-large and expensive cable TV packages are being discarded in favour of the Netflix offer. This is the feared 'cord cutting' phenomenon that has led many US TV providers to ask whether they are big enough to survive this new competition. Disney's strategy is to grow through acquisition and to enter the video on demand market investing large sums in original production. It appears that Murdoch has chosen to avoid the risks of investing in original entertainment (movies, drama), focusing instead on news and the political influence that this can bring. Fox News in the US, unhindered by the UK impartiality requirements, is perhaps the jewel in his crown along with an extensive range of newspapers in the US, UK and Australia. These are to be his commanding heights.

While many British politicians and TV producers have their eyes on American investment it is worth noting - without complacency - the successes of the BBC. The innovative national content creation fund, otherwise known as the BBC Licence Fee, has served audiences well as the BBC share of audiences - at 32 per cent of total - testifies. But the value of this Fee for investment in original production was cut significantly by Government in 2010 and again in 2015. As the BBC limps increasingly into the arena of international co-production it will face challenges in fulfilling its national mission just as Disney will face difficulties in bracing itself for entry into the global online market.

CABINET RESHUFFLE



In the recent Cabinet reshuffle former Minister of State for Digital, Matt Hancock MP, has been appointed as Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. VLV looks forward to working with Mr Hancock on PSB issues and hopes to arrange a meeting with VLV members at some point later in 2018.

A NEW CHAIRMAN FOR OFCOM

Following the end of Dame Patricia Hodgson's term as Chairman of Ofcom in December 2017, Lord Terry Burns, former Chairman of Channel 4, has been appointed as her successor.



VLV welcomes his appointment. Lord Burns has been involved in PSB matters for many years. From 2004 to 2006, Lord Burns was Independent Adviser to the Secretary of State on the 2006 BBC Charter Review. He sits as a cross-bench peer in the House of Lords.

CHANNEL 4: A NEW ERA?



Channel 4 is entering a period of creative and strategic renewal following the arrival of Alex Mahon as its new Chief Executive late last year and the appointment of Ian Katz (pictured), former Editor of *Newsnight*, as its Director of Programmes. It is understood that the DCMS and Channel 4 are still in discussion about the location of Channel 4 and its headquarters following public consultation in 2017 on its regional impact.

A NEW BBC CHANNEL FOR SCOTLAND?

Ofcom has decided that proposals for a new BBC Scotland channel require a further competition assessment. This will assess whether the public value outweighs any potential adverse effects on fair and effective competition.



VLV members will be aware that, over many years, viewers and listeners in Scotland have been unhappy with aspects of what has been on offer from the BBC. Dating back to the early days of the BBC, a strong desire for programming which reflects and represents the distinctive nature of Scotland as a nation and culture has not been met. The Corporation has been perceived to be too London-centric and, despite the BBC's recent attempts to address this via the out of London strategy, the problem persists. The new channel aims to address these issues and better meet the needs of licence fee payers north of the border.

Viewers in the rest of the UK should also gain from this proposal in that the investment in production and economic investment across the nations and regions will be more fairly spread. The programming should also enhance the offer made by the BBC as a whole. The notable success of BBC Alba provides an excellent model of what is possible.

It is intended that the new channel will broadcast from noon each day with original programming, including political coverage and other ad hoc events (mainly sport), on air until 7pm. The core evening hours will include a news hour at 9pm every weekday "alongside a mix of documentaries, specialist factual, lifestyle, music, quiz and factual entertainment". The news will comprise Scottish, UK and international news from a Scottish perspective.

The channel could include material currently shown on BBC Two Scotland, and either simulcasts or repeats of content shown on BBC One Scotland. Repeats of programmes from other BBC channels or archive may also be on offer. As a consequence of the proposal, separate programming for Scotland on BBC Two will cease, with audiences in Scotland receiving the same programming as audiences in England: a welcome development.

The channel's programme budget would be around £32 million per year, which has generated widespread criticism as being insufficient for what is envisaged. Ofcom will publish emerging conclusions before the end of April and make a decision by July. VLV would welcome comment from members on the Ofcom consultation.

ROBERT CLARK 1946-2018



We are all saddened by the death of Robert Clark after a long fight against myeloma. He was a VLV member from the early 1990s with, in his own words, 'a passion and concern for diverse, high quality radio'.

Robert took an active role on behalf of VLV in the public consultation during the previous BBC Charter renewal and was the VLV representative on groups monitoring consumer and citizen interests during the switch over of analogue to digital TV transmissions. He was a VLV board Director and then Trustee from 2006 and VLV Honorary Secretary from 2010 until 2013.

After a career managing state benefit provision in East London that ended with early retirement he did voluntary work, mostly for community organisations.

Robert was unique. He was an unmissable figure at VLV conferences, with his tweed cap, slightly untamed beard, fold-up bicycle and always ready with a question about radio. He had a deep Quaker faith and constantly offered support and kindness to those he met. He and Susan loved Italy, but were equally happy when on holiday in the Orkneys. They were regular sponsors of the St Magnus International Music Festival and would enjoy many Proms each year.

NEW VLV AWARDS ANNOUNCED

Attached to this mailing for VLV members are the ballot papers for the 2017 VLV Awards for Excellence in Broadcasting. The awards this year include two new categories, one for the Best Sports Programme on radio or television, sponsored by Arqiva, and the other for International Content sponsored by the International Broadcasting Trust.

Arqiva are also sponsoring an Award for Innovation, the recipient to be chosen by the VLV Trustees in consultation with Arqiva. We are very grateful to both these organisations for their support.

The VLV Awards are an opportunity to celebrate the wealth of excellent programmes across all channels and networks broadcast in 2017. Winners say that they particularly value these awards, first introduced almost thirty years ago, because they are chosen by the people who really matter: their listeners and viewers.

VLV AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN BROADCASTING 2017

Voting papers should be returned to the VLV office by **Tuesday, 6 March**

FAKE NEWS: OUR DUTY TO WARN

Professor Bob Usherwood

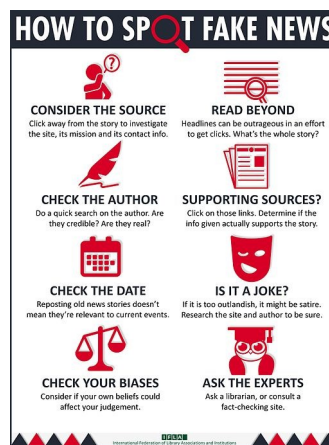
The use of the term “Fake News” increased by 365% in 2017 according to the publishers of Collins Dictionary who named it their ‘Word of the Year’. But what does it mean? There is a problem of definition. Collins defines it as: “false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting”. However, President Trump who claims to have invented the phrase (He didn’t) regularly cites quality and trusted broadcasters such as the BBC or CNN as purveyors of fake news.

That is probably not the opinion of many VLV members but as Professor Julian Petley pointed out, when writing about attacks on the BBC, “we have been faced with the unedifying spectacle of some of the worst newspapers in the world constantly attacking one of the most nationally and internationally respected broadcasting organisations.” (Petley 2011). Such action is not limited to the Murdoch press but this means there are people in the country who will share Trump’s view.

The recent vote in the House of Lords asking the Government to keep its promise to complete the Leveson Inquiry is a relevant and in many ways a promising development but, as with their attacks on the BBC, sections of the UK press are “cranking up the disinformation” (Cathcart 2018). The newly appointed Culture Secretary, Matthew Hancock, described this as a vote “to restrict press freedoms [and] ... undermine high quality journalism.” In fact, it would help sustain high quality journalism and the only ‘freedom’ it restricts is the freedom to fake the news or, as we used to say, tell lies.

As our recent history indicates, exacerbated by and increasingly published by social media sites, fake news can lead to actions. Hate speech becomes ‘acceptable’ and democracy is liable to be corrupted. This raises challenges and opportunities not only for broadcasters and journalists, but for the concerned citizens of a democratic society. VLV members and others who have specialist areas of expertise could all have a part to play in limiting the damage. Collective action is more likely to gain attention and we should co-operate with arts organisations, community workers, educators, human rights organisations, library and information professionals, museum workers and many others.

For example, library and information professionals across the world have developed interesting programmes and initiatives. The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) has developed an infographic on how to spot fake news. It has been translated into 37 languages, and reported on CNN International.



Credit: IFLA

BBC local radio stations, like public libraries, are trusted organisations and still an integral part of their local communities. They have some, but not enough, staff with the skills required to help the public identify trustworthy sources of information. Poorly funded local radio stations and savagely-cut, volunteer-dominated library services are not capable of providing adequate instruction in media literacy. For these and other reasons we need to work with others with similar values and concerns.

Fake news “blurs the lines between fact and fiction, truth and lies” (Levine 2017) and few who work in the media, the information professions, the arts and related activities would want to censor their output or collections to the extent that users never had access to fiction or lies. After all, to quote Camus, “Fiction is the lie through which we tell the truth”. Think of *Cathy Come Home*, *Boys from the Blackstuff* and, currently, *McMafia*. What broadcasters, librarians, and others can and should do is educate people so they are aware of what is likely to be true or false.

In the United States psychiatrists and mental health experts concerned by *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump* have considered embracing their ‘duty to warn’ “at times of danger... not only sounding an alarm but [by] continually educating and engaging in a dialogue our fellow human beings.” (Lee 2017) That is a role that every VLV member could undertake.

The huge growth in fake news means that we live in “times of danger”. As supporters of an organisation that champions “excellence and diversity in broadcasting” our ‘duty to warn’ is equally clear.



Bob Usherwood is a VLV Trustee and former Professor of Librarianship at the University of Sheffield.

MORE CHALLENGES IN STORE FOR AUDIENCES BECAUSE OF SPECTRUM POLICY?

Gordon Drury

VLV continues to be concerned with government spectrum policy and how it impacts on free to air digital television services. We have made numerous submissions to Ofcom, highlighting the need to ensure that UK citizens who enjoy digital terrestrial TV (DTT), such as Freeview, should not be disadvantaged by UK spectrum policy which is under pressure from mobile phone operators.

Before Digital SwitchOver in 2012 the spectrum dedicated to DTT was between 470 and 862 MHz. Ofcom's spectrum policy since 2012 has been to divide this band into 4 blocks: "500", "600", "700" and "800" MHz bands. The "800" band was allocated to mobile operators for new 4G services. TV services were moved into the lower 500 and 700 bands and the 600 band was subsequently granted to Arqiva with limited life licences to provide 2 HTDV Interim Multiplex signals using newer MPEG-4/DVB-T2 technology.

Further aggressive global demand from mobile operators has led to international agreements that the upper part of the 700 band (above 694 MHz) should also be allocated to them so some DTT transmissions will now be moved into the lower bands. After a number of consultations Ofcom have concluded that all but Interim Multiplex DTT services can be fitted into the spectrum between 470 and 694MHz. So Digital Terrestrial TV must now operate in only 224 MHz of bandwidth compared to the original 392.

The Interim Multiplexes have now been moved to the Upper 700 band where new mobile phone services will be located in due course. This means they are at risk in the future since Ofcom is clearly not able or willing to find room with the other DTT transmissions for them. The loss of these services which use more efficient technology will be a major setback for the future evolution of DTT because the number of HDTV services will be reduced and the incentive for viewers to acquire new sets equipped with the new technology will also diminish.

In light of all this, another major clearance project, to be completed by 2020, has now been planned to remove DTT transmissions from the Upper 700 band. At the very least some viewers will be required to retune their sets as and when their local transmitter is re-engineered; a few viewers may require new aerials and after 2020 some may suffer interference requiring remedial action.

During the 800 band clearance interference risk was mitigated by filters which were fitted in the aerial lead and the same solution will be used for 700 clearance. Experience of the 800 clearance suggests that no major unexpected issues will arise and a 2017 Ofcom consultation, which VLV submitted to, has broadly confirmed the planning assumptions. VLV expects that a full viewer support scheme similar to that in place for the 800 clearance will be established.

REPORTING THE WORLD

Phil Harding

There has never been a more important time for us to know about the rest of the world. Our everyday lives are increasingly affected by a world that is becoming ever more inter-connected. Contracts are won, jobs are lost, families' standards of living are often determined by decisions made on the other side of the planet. Factories are closed at the stroke of a pen thousands of miles away. The failure of the rice crop in Indonesia puts up the prices on our supermarket shelves.

More and more people are either being forced to or are choosing to live far from where they were born. In London schools more than 300 languages are spoken, in Manchester 72 languages. In a world of increasing migration to know the world is to know your street. Yet in this country survey after survey appears to show that we know frighteningly little about the rest of the world. The Brexit referendum reinforced that.

For Britons to understand and have control over their lives in today's changing world we need to know about the forces that are shaping events across the globe. The media, especially the broadcast media, have a crucial role to play in this. Broadcast coverage of the wider world matters.

That's why in this context it is disappointing that Channel Four have announced that they intend to cut back on their excellent *Unreported World* series from 16 episodes a year to 12. This is despite the fact that the Channel in its last Annual Report picked out the award-winning series as one of the programmes that epitomised the very spirit and values of the Channel boasting that "*our delivery of Current Affairs will continue to grow, building on the success of Unreported World and Dispatches ...*"

The Channel has blamed the economic downturn and the lack of advertising revenue for the cuts. Channel Four is a commercially funded public broadcaster. It can only spend what it takes in in advertising and commercial income.

The Channel has to manage its finances according to its income. But it seems both unfortunate and strange that such an important and valued part of its output should be cut so soon after it had been lauded so loudly and at a time when international output on our airwaves is needed more than ever. The decision was taken by the previous management team at Four and those close to the programme are now hoping that the incoming Director of Programmes (and former editor of *Newsnight*), Ian Katz, will find a way to reverse it.

The risk for British audiences is plain. Without a continued commitment to programmes such as *Unreported World*, programming about the wider world on British television will become first marginalised and then disappear altogether. By the time anyone realises it has gone it will be too late.

Phil Harding is a journalist and broadcaster, former editor of the Radio 4 Today programme and Controller of Editorial Policy at the BBC.

A NEW DIRECTION FOR BBC EDUCATION?

Wendy Jones

In the next few weeks – possibly even before you read this – the BBC is due to reveal a new and long-awaited strategy on education. This has to be welcome news. It's a good few years since the last strategy was published and at times the BBC has seemed uncertain over its education mission.

That is not to say that programme-makers and content producers haven't been delivering some excellent material and projects under the education banner. There have been strong education campaigns that have delivered genuine audience participation in areas such as digital literacy and popular history and science. CBeebies continues to offer a unique educational service for pre-schoolers and *Bitesize*, which started as TV programmes in the 1990s, has gone from strength to strength and is now a video-rich online resource of study material.

But there have been too many changes in direction, not enough debate about the BBC's educational purpose in the 21st century and, perhaps most seriously, the BBC as an institution has not seemed to value its education mission sufficiently. Directors-General have rarely made speeches about education in recent years.

Perhaps some of this uncertainty dates back to the knock that the BBC took a decade ago with the BBC Trust's decision to kill off BBC Jam, the innovative digital education service mortally wounded by competitors angry at the BBC's intervention in what they regarded as their marketplace. The demise of Jam deprived UK children of an innovative educational resource, saw £100 million of licence fee funding wasted, but drew relatively few complaints from licence payers. It was a low point from which the BBC's learning department took some time to recover.

Today the BBC still has to carry the flag for education among public service broadcasters. ITV quit formal education several years ago and Channel 4 now concentrates on non-curricular life skills for teenagers (and it does this very well – arguably better than the BBC). But only the BBC has a broad all-age remit to stimulate interest in “a full range of subjects and issues through content that is accessible and can encourage... learning” and to provide specialist educational content.

It is the informal side of this – especially for adults – that has always been hardest to define. If the BBC still adheres to the original Reithian trinity of ‘inform, educate, entertain’, how does it extract the educational value and which programmes and content does it see as most ‘educational’? Highbrow arts and history programmes? Literary drama adaptations? Or cookery and quiz shows? Popular science programmes? Soaps that say something about modern society and relationships? Potentially all of those and much more besides.

So it will be interesting to see what the BBC comes up with – how it defines education and what areas it prioritises. There is a lot of ground to be regained but I, for one, am optimistic.



Wendy Jones, is a VLV trustee, former head of policy at BBC Learning and former BBC education correspondent.

GIVING TO THE VLV FOR FREE

Patrick McIntosh

“News of my death is greatly exaggerated”. So said Mark Twain but when it happens to us all, we can all do something for nothing.

After all, you can't take your wealth with you, but you can leave a lasting legacy for generations to enjoy forever and by leaving a legacy you can reduce the tax burden on those you leave behind.

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So why not do something for nothing and support the VLV in its vital work? The world would be a much poorer place without the magic of Britain's public service broadcasting system which VLV supports.


For any help or guidance on giving to the VLV please contact us and we can advise you about how to help us help you and future generations.

Patrick McIntosh, VLV trustee, is a triple cancer survivor who walked unaided to the South Pole and raised £29,000 for the VLV three years ago. He says, 'If can do it and I am not dead so can you!'.



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VLV's 35th Spring Conference: Challenges for public service broadcasting in a digital age

and

The VLV Awards for Excellence in Broadcasting 2017

Thursday 19 April 2018

*The Geological Society,
 Piccadilly, London W1J 0BG
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The conference will be followed by
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VLV's 35th Autumn Conference
Tuesday 27th November 2018

*The Geological Society,
 Piccadilly, London W1J 0BG*

VLV will announce other events during the next few months - watch email alerts and the website for details.

VLV AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN BROADCASTING 2017

Voting papers should be returned to the VLV office by **Tuesday, 6 March 2018.**

Keeping up to date

VLV will be sending out regular updates by email - so please ensure that Sue Washbrook has your up-to-date email address or else keep looking at the website at www.vlv.org.uk



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