



Voice of the Listener & Viewer

Championing Excellence and Diversity in Broadcasting

Spring 2022

Bulletin 133

VLV FEARS CUTS TO BBC SERVICES ARE INEVITABLE

The Secretary of State, Nadine Dorries, announced on 17th January in Parliament that BBC income will not rise in line with inflation during 2022 and 2023. The announcement came after months of negotiations between the BBC and the government.

As a result, VLV believes that the BBC will be forced to cut services for UK licence fee payers at a time when it is up against strong competition from global streaming platforms. This move could prove to be very damaging for its reach, popularity and impact.

If the BBC does continue to provide the same level of output as today, VLV analysis shows that this is likely to lead to a deficit of between £3 and £5 billion by 2027, depending on production cost inflation.

This is clearly unsustainable. Inflation in production costs is currently estimated to be between 5% and 35%, depending on the genre of programme being made. If inflation in production costs averages 6% for the coming 5 years, VLV estimates this will lead to a deficit of £3 billion. If inflation averages 9%, this increases the deficit to £5 billion.

VLV's analysis of BBC public funding since 2010 shows that prior to the new settlement BBC publicly funded income had already declined by 25% since 2010 in real terms. This is the third time the government has effectively cut BBC funding. Previous settlements in 2010 and 2015 were equally damaging.

Since 2010 the BBC has managed to absorb the cuts in its funding and cost increases without closing any services, largely through efficiency savings and reducing costs on content. Ofcom recently noted that BBC content spend had dropped by 28% in real terms between 2010 and 2020. VLV considers there is not much more which can be cut without losing services or increasing the number of repeated programmes.

VLV has long argued that the process for setting the BBC's funding should be reformed. It should not be conducted behind closed doors without any parliamentary or public scrutiny. VLV proposes that an independent body should be established to recommend a level of funding for the BBC and that no decision should be reached until there has been Parliamentary debate. This would provide greater transparency and reinforce the independence of the BBC, including protection from political decisions by the Government of the day. Such a change in process is needed especially now it is clear that trust in media is declining.

VLV SPRING CONFERENCE

Wednesday, April 27th 2022

10.30am - 13.00pm



VLV will hold its Spring Conference, online, on 27th April 2022.

We are delighted that Tim Davie, Director General of the BBC, will be a keynote speaker at the conference. His appearance comes at a pivotal time, when the BBC will face difficult decisions on which content to cut, following a below-inflation funding settlement for the years 2022-2028.

We are also pleased to announce that Janine Gibson, of *The Financial Times*, will be chairing this session. The conference will provide a valuable opportunity to ask the Director General how the BBC intends to continue to deliver high quality services for UK citizens.

You can book your place at this event at www.payments.vlv.org.uk/Event-Search or by completing a booking form or calling the VLV office. We hope you will be able to join us.

SAVE THE DATE: 23rd JUNE THE VLV AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE

After two years when Covid-19 ruled out a physical awards ceremony, this year we will once again present the awards in person at a ceremony at the Geological Society, London on 23rd June 2022.

We hope you will be able to join us at this celebration of excellence in British broadcasting.

Ballot papers for the Awards are included with this Bulletin for members and information about how to vote can also be found on the back page.

Details of how to book to attend the awards will be sent out in due course.

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VLV represents citizen and consumer interests in broadcasting and champions excellence and diversity in 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 broadcasting.

Views expressed in the bulletin are those of contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of the VLV.

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FROM THE CHAIRMAN, COLIN BROWNE

Welcome to our Spring 2022 Bulletin.



In our previous Bulletin, in the Autumn, I wrote that the BBC desperately needed a licence fee set **at least** at the level of inflation for the remaining five years of its current Charter. Without that it would be forced into making cuts in its services.

We now know that it has not been granted such an increase, with the level of the licence fee being frozen for the next two years and then linked to CPI for the subsequent three years.

This is a deeply disappointing 'settlement' imposed on the BBC by the Government. We calculate that it would lead to a shortfall of at least £3bn by the end of the period if the BBC were to maintain its output at current levels.

While the BBC will doubtless seek as many efficiency savings as it can, these will clearly not be enough to fill the gap. Cuts in services and output will be inevitable.

We believe that it is important that the BBC consults with licence payers on how these savings will be achieved. We will be pressing the BBC on this.

I am very pleased that Tim Davie, the BBC Director-General, has agreed to be the opening speaker at our online Spring Conference on 29th April. We will be able to question him on some of these issues at that time. The session will be chaired by Janine Gibson of *The Financial Times*.

Nadine Dorries, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport tweeted, at the time of the licence fee announcement, that the licence fee itself would cease at the end of the five-year charter period. She back-tracked somewhat on this in her statement to the House of Commons but made it clear that there would need to be a full review of the best method of funding the BBC. The VLV will, of course, be seeking to play an active role in that debate and to work with other groups and individuals who share our belief in the importance to society of a properly funded BBC.

At the time of writing, there is still no announcement from Government about the future of Channel 4. The Government's preferred approach of moving it into the private sector has met with strong opposition from many across the media and cultural sectors. Let's hope the Government has listened!

There is also no intelligence about an expected media bill, which would hopefully deal with the very important issue of prominence for the public service broadcasters. All the PSBs face huge challenges, as a result of changes in competition, in the market, in technology and indeed in society at large. Political decisions, or inaction, often exacerbate their problems. Patrick Barwise sets these out very clearly in his article on page 6.

We are planning to discuss these issues at our Spring Conference. Radio of course is close to the heart of many VLV members. The doyenne of radio critics and VLV patron, Gillian Reynolds, talks about her lifelong love affair with the medium on page 8.

While our Spring Conference is again being held online, we are planning that our Awards ceremony on 23rd June will be our first in-person event since the pandemic struck. Do please return your voting papers and I look forward to seeing many of you there.

Colin Browne,
Chairman of VLV

NEW INTERIM C4 CHAIRMAN



Dawn Airey has been appointed as Channel 4's interim chair, replacing Charles Gurassa.

Ms Airey joined the C4 Board in December 2021, as a non-executive director.

Her career has

included roles as chair and CEO of Channel 5, managing director of channels and services for BSkyB, managing director of global content at ITV, and senior vice-president of Europe, Middle East and Africa at Yahoo.

She is currently chair of the National Youth Theatre, Barclays FA Women's Super League and FA Women's championship.

Ms Airey's appointment was approved by the Secretary of State for DCMS, Nadine Dorries. Ms Airey will remain interim chair of C4, until a permanent chair is appointed.

Her appointment comes at an important time for C4, whose ownership is under review by the current government, which is considering whether to privatise it. Channel 4 has been publicly owned since it launched in 1982.

NEW CEO OF BBC NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS



Deborah Turness has been appointed the BBC's new CEO of news and current affairs, replacing Fran Unsworth.

Turness was president of NBC News from 2013 until 2017 and later President of NBC News International.

She previously worked as editor of ITV News and since April 2021 she has been the CEO of ITN.

In a statement, Turness said there "has never been a greater need for the BBC's powerful brand of impartial, trusted journalism".

"It is a great privilege to be asked to lead and grow BBC News at a time of accelerated digital growth and innovation, when its content is reaching more global consumers on more platforms than ever before," she said.

NEW CHAIR & MEMBERS OF THE LORDS COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE



Official portrait -UK Parliament

Baroness Stowell of Beeston has been appointed Chair of the House of Lords Select Committee on Communications and Digital, replacing Lord Gilbert of Panteg.

New members of the Committee have also been announced: Lord Hall of Birkenhead, Baroness Harding of Winscombe and Lord Young of Norwood Green.

Viscount Colville of Culross and Lord Stevenson of Balmacara have both stood down.

The first inquiry of the Committee under its new chairmanship, which is relevant to VLV concerns, will examine future funding models for the BBC when its Charter expires in 2027 (see page 4).

NEW VLV TRUSTEES

We are delighted to welcome two new trustees to the Board of VLV, both of whom were voted in at the AGM on 2nd December 2021.

Toni Charlton and Sue Washbrook are already well known to VLV members.

After a career in the BBC, Toni served as VLV Treasurer until 2018, and Sue was VLV's Administrator for some 20 years until her retirement in 2019.

We are grateful to all our trustees, who are all volunteers; without them the VLV would not be able to carry on its important work.



Toni Charlton



Sue Washbrook

100 YEARS OF THE BBC



2022 is the BBC's 100th year. The BBC began its centenary celebrations with a film that highlights the special place that the BBC holds in the hearts of UK people and its culture.

It features clips of memorable moments through the broadcasting ages, creating a narrative which tells the story of the BBC's history. The film is part of the BBC's 100 Years campaign, demonstrating how central it is to UK life and culture, illustrating that it has something for everyone and that it belongs to every one of us.

The film, *'This is our BBC'*, stars a host of famous faces, including Idris Elba, Sir David Attenborough, Jodi Comer, Dizzee Rascal and newsreaders through the decades. It is littered with memorable moments, captured by the BBC over the years, from Freddie Mercury at Live Aid, Adele at Glastonbury, and the Proms. It was created by the BBC's in-house agency, BBC Creative.

You can view the film at

[www.https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FlN2YiF_Zak](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FlN2YiF_Zak)

TalkTV LAUNCH



New TV channel TalkTV, operated by Rupert Murdoch's News UK's operation, is due to launch this Spring. It has revealed its logo in the lead up to the launch.

The new station will feature a line-up of opinion and debate-led programming, in addition to traditional news and sports bulletins, with Piers Morgan hosting its flagship weeknight show. It will use talent and programming from across News UK operation including *The Sun*, *Times*, *Sunday Times*, Times Radio, Talkradio, Talksport and Virgin Radio to air a mixture of new shows and televised content from these brands

Revealing the channel's look, News UK's executive director of broadcasting, Erron Gordon, said; "At TalkTV we will be covering the big stories of the day and beyond, stories that matter to our audience."

The new channel will be available through content on all platforms, including linear TV, social media and News UK's own websites and apps.

UPDATE ON C4 PRIVATISATION



At the time of going to press, there have been no further updates on the proposed privatisation of Channel 4.

In February senior Tory MPs wrote to the Prime Minister calling for the government to drop its plans to privatise the corporation, arguing that such a move would damage the "levelling up" agenda, and run contrary to the founding vision of Margaret Thatcher. They included former culture secretary Karen Bradley and ex-cabinet minister Damian Green, as well as Tom Tugendhat and Stephen Hammond.

As we hear more, we will let you know.

Lords Inquiry into BBC Funding



The House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee is holding an inquiry into the future of the BBC, focused on its funding model. VLV has made a submission, highlighting the interests of citizens, which is available on our website.

This inquiry is timely because it will feed into government deliberations on how to fund the BBC in future which have already begun, according to a tweet by the Culture Secretary, Nadine Dorries, in January. The call for evidence is wide-ranging. It asks what the role of a 'national broadcaster' should be, how the BBC should change to adapt to evolving consumer habits and what the BBC's priorities should be.

A key question is whether citizens will continue to be prepared to pay the TV Licence when there are so many other platforms where they can now find content. There has been a drop in the number of people paying the fee in recent years and regular attacks by BBC competitors and detractors have undoubtedly taken their toll on support for a universal TV licence.

VLV is concerned that the future of the BBC and, more broadly, the public service broadcasting system as a whole, could be undermined if the model for funding the BBC is changed, forcing it to become more commercial. Since the current funding model is universal, the BBC has to provide a wide range of content for all audiences across the UK. If it becomes a subscription service, it will only need to satisfy the demands of those who choose to pay for it, effectively shifting its motivation from one of public service to one which is largely commercial. This is likely to lead to the commissioning of more popular, mainstream content and a reduction in risk-taking, innovation and the range of programming available to audiences. In VLV's view, the TV licence could be more progressive but the model of funding should remain universal if the societal benefits of public service broadcasting are to be maintained.

Separately, VLV also highlights in its submission its long-standing concern that the process for negotiating BBC funding should be reformed. The current system lacks transparency. Negotiations are held behind closed doors and are not subject to any public or parliamentary scrutiny. This undermines the independence of the BBC from government.

All VLV policy submissions can be found at:
www.vlv.org.uk/issues-policies/vlv-consultation-responses/

YOUNG AUDIENCES CONTENT FUND - WHY CLOSE A SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVE FOR UK CHILDREN?

By Professor Jeanette Steemers



Last month on the British Film Institute's website, it was quietly announced that the DCMS would be ending the three year pilot for the Young Audiences Content Fund (YACF) and that applications for funding and developing children's content would close on 25th February.

Since it began in 2019 with £57m over 3 years, sourced from left over licence fee funding from digital rollout, the fund has supported 144 development projects and 55 new productions, commissioned by the commercial PSBs (ITV, Five, Channel Four) and language broadcasters S4C and BBC Alba.

These have included *The World According to Grandpa* (Five/S4C), *Makeaway Takeaway* (CITV), *How* (CITV), *Teen First Dates* (E4), *Letters in Lockdown* (E4/All4), *Quentin Blake's Clown* (C4), *FYI News Specials* (Sky News and First News) and many more still in production. The public service credentials of the fund are incontrovertible, fulfilling criteria on quality, innovation, additionality, nations and regions, diversity, new voices, plurality and reach.

The YACF, under Director Jackie Edwards, represented a joined-up intervention from Ofcom and the Government in response to years of market failure in the provision of UK-originated children's screen content, where commercial PSBs no longer felt it was economically viable to support children's commissions. Before the YACF, commissioning of children's PSB content had become largely the preserve of the BBC, whose own funds are under pressure. Closing the fund reverts the sector back to 2019 when the BBC was practically the only commissioning PSB.

The Government's decision is disappointing given its commitment to YACF as recently as 17th June 2021 in its response to the House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee's inquiry into the Future of Public Service Broadcasting. The committee recommended that the Government evaluate YACF's success against its goals and extend the scheme "if it is found to be increasing the investment in original content for children in the UK".

The DCMS duly complied, agreeing that "children's programming is an essential source of entertainment and learning for young people in the UK" and that it was "committed to ensuring young audiences have access to engaging and relevant content that reflects UK society and their own diverse experiences across the nations and regions".

In its response the government said it would undertake a full pilot evaluation to determine impact "on the provision and plurality of public service content for young audiences" and that a decision on the future of the fund (closure, maintenance or expansion) would only take place after "detailed evaluation of the scheme". This regrettably has not happened.

What did happen between June 2021 and January 2022 was the Secretary of State's decision about the future of the licence fee. In her letter to the BBC on 21st January the Secretary of State said there would be no deduction through "contestable funding". This may have signalled the end for the YACF, as the DCMS did not specify any alternative funding sources for the fund, and the announcement of its closure shortly afterwards. This move was in contrast to recent DCMS awards to the gaming sector (£8m) and the UK Global Screen Fund (£21m)

The Children's Media Foundation is now co-ordinating a response from a number of groups and individuals, asking the Secretary of State to reconsider her decision and grant the YACF an extension with direct DCMS funding of £10m a year, at least until there are clearer views on PSB. Without the YACF, which provided up to 50% of production budgets, it is probable that the commercial PSBs may simply stop supporting UK children's content. Further, without the YACF the Ofcom strategy for children's commercial public service content, which involves encouragement of the commercial PSBs, falls apart. Recent changes at BBC Children's, with closer alignment to BBC Studios, and more investment in animation also suggests that children's drama and factual programming will be affected.

An Open Letter to Nadine Dorries, has been written, highlighting the success of the YACF, what will be at risk if it is closed and why children in the UK benefit from public service content in respect to civil society, education and their sense of well-being and belonging.

If you agree that the Young Audiences Content Fund should continue, not least to further test funding alternatives for public service content in a rapidly changing sector, please sign and pass on:

www.thechildrensmediafoundation.org/the-young-audiences-content-fund-campaign#letter

Jeanette Steemers is Professor of Culture, Media and Creative Industries at Kings College, London, and Chair of the YACF's Advisory Steering Committee.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES OF UK PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTERS?

By Patrick Barwise

The PSBs, like all British TV broadcasters, face a tough combination of ever-growing competition for viewers, rising real content costs (driven by the big US 'streamers') and pressure on their revenue - especially the BBC, because of deep cumulative funding cuts. The BBC and Channel 4 are also under political pressure. This briefing summarises the current state of play on these challenges.



Pressure from the streamers; more competition, higher costs: The 'streamers' are pure-play online TV companies that distribute their content via video-on-demand (VoD), funded either by subscriptions ('SVoD') or advertising ('AVoD'). The SVoD players (Netflix, Amazon and Disney+), with their huge programme budgets, are driving up the cost of content, production facilities and talent. The AVoD players, mainly YouTube (part of Alphabet/Google), have had less impact on programme and production costs because they get most of their content for free. But they attract a lot of viewing, especially among younger viewers - more than the SVoD services which, being subscription-based, prioritise audience satisfaction over audience size. Few people only watch the streamers. Instead, most split their viewing between them and the traditional broadcasters, including the PSBs. But, with growing competition and rising content costs, the PSBs are having to work harder than ever to retain viewers, especially younger viewers.

Pressure on commercial PSBs' ad revenue: Since the 1990s, people have constantly predicted the imminent death of traditional TV advertising, the commercial PSBs' main revenue source. There are certainly challenges: smaller, more fragmented audiences; competition for companies' advertising budgets both from YouTube and, indirectly, other free-to-access online services like Google and Facebook; and more advertising avoidance as more people time-shift their viewing and fast-forward through the breaks. However, the commercial PSBs have largely managed to sustain their advertising revenue, partly by stressing their continuing role as the only TV/video players still able to deliver high reach in a fragmented market; partly by aggressively developing their own online advertising revenue. They are also diversifying beyond advertising. ITV, in particular, has built up a substantial TV production business.

Pressure on BBC funding: In contrast, the BBC is in real peril because of deep funding cuts against rising costs and competition. VLV estimated a 30 per cent cut in its real (inflation-adjusted) net public funding between 2010 and 2019 - far more than most people realise.

It has managed to claw back some of this reduction by limiting free TV licences to households with at least one member aged over 75 and receiving Pension Credit.

This decision was much criticised by the BBC's enemies. But, in the event, over 90 per cent of those no longer eligible have paid up, thanks to a well-executed BBC communications campaign explaining that paying for free licences for all households with over-75s - regardless of household size or income - would have forced it to make significant service cuts.

As the National Audit Office has confirmed, the Government's new two-year licence fee freeze will lead to a reduction in BBC service quality (lower budgets, more repeats, etc). At some point, it will finally be forced to shut down some TV and radio channels. No one asked the public if this is really what they want, to save a few pence per household per week.

Political pressure on the BBC: The main threat to the BBC is the combination of rising real costs and deep cumulative funding cuts, imposed by the Government (with no public consultation or parliamentary scrutiny) in 2010, 2015 and now 2022. The decision to keep the proposal to decriminalise licence fee evasion 'under review' is a further threat and distraction.

The BBC is also relentlessly attacked and undermined in other ways, analysed in detail in *The War Against the BBC* - www.patrickbarwise.com/the-war-against-the-bbc. One recurrent theme is attempts by right-wing politicians, newspapers and think tanks to persuade the public not to trust its allegedly left-liberal political coverage. These attacks have been remarkably unsuccessful: the public still trusts the BBC far more than it trusts either the Government or the newspapers constantly telling them not to trust it. Indirectly, however, they may have made the BBC more cautious in its news coverage and have certainly forced it to introduce more rules and bureaucracy to reduce editorial risks.

The funding cuts have also forced it to reduce headcount through voluntary redundancies, losing many senior, experienced editors, producers and presenters - and increasing the risk of mistakes, which are then eagerly seized on by the Beeb-bashing newspapers. High-profile recent leavers include Andrew Marr, Emily Maitlis and Jon Sopel. Working for commercial broadcasters, they will now have more freedom to express their views, their pay will be both higher than at the BBC and confidential, and they will be much less subject to attacks in the press and social media.

Political pressure on Channel 4: the recurrent privatisation threat: Channel 4 is also criticised for alleged left-wing bias but - perhaps because of its smaller size and its advertising funding - not on anything like the same scale as the BBC. Instead, the recurrent threat is privatisation, an idea that has already been repeatedly rejected and is opposed by Channel 4 itself, VLV, groups representing independent producers (Pact) and advertisers (ISBA), independent analysts like Enders Analysis and, almost certainly, most of the 60,000 respondents to the Government's consultation, which closed on 14th September 2021 but whose results have still not been published. We still do not know if the Government will persist with Channel 4 privatisation despite this almost universal opposition.

Patrick Barwise is Emeritus Professor of Management and Marketing, London Business School, Chairman of the Archive of Market and Social Research and co-author, with Peter York, of 'The War Against the BBC'.

THE BIRTH OF BRITISH BROADCASTING

By Tim Wander

Today, it's almost impossible to imagine a world without radio, or its sister, television. But, on the eve of the First World War, when the science of radio was less than 20 years old, the ether crackled with radio signals, all the monotonous clatter of Morse code.

Within two years of war, the science of radio speech transmission had developed to the point where robust, reliable and portable equipment allowed ground to air and air to air communication. This rapid technical development was met by a number of young men both fascinated by, and now well trained in, the new art of wireless communication.

By 1918, radio had transformed from an inventor's plaything, into a faithful workhorse. The same war that had driven science and engineering to develop the equipment would now make it possible for the general public to 'listen in', as massive quantities of war surplus equipment were freely available. The social structure of the world had been torn apart by war and the new world was ready to listen, hungry for instant news, especially as the world was also under the grip of the Spanish flu – a pandemic that would kill over 70 million people.

The Marconi Co. was still convinced that Morse code was the most reliable form of communication between ships and ship and shore and there was a general belief that speech transmission, known as telephony, had no real place in the ether. So it was that a group of young engineers, born into the Victorian age, fresh from military service during the war and working for the very formal and huge Company that Marconi had built, strode into history - the time was right for radio broadcasting to occur.

In Britain the first broadcasts were, in the great tradition of radio, complete accidents. Two Marconi engineers, H.J. Round and W.T. Ditcham, first brought entertainment to the airwaves. Their transmitter tests soon became far more than telephony experiments, with regular evenings of music and news, including the famous concert by Dame Nellie Melba, becoming true firsts in the history of radio.

In 1920, for her historical broadcast, the great lady herself, Dame Nellie Melba, was shown the 450 ft. high twin masts towering over the factory and the town – she was told that, from the top, her voice would be heard throughout the world. Her answer is radio folklore: *"Young Man, if you think I'm going to climb up there you are very much mistaken"*. The lady did sing, was heard throughout Europe, but the Postmaster General decided that Britain wasn't ready for broadcasting and closed the station down.

On 14th February 1922, it all started again, in a small village in Essex. A weak, static laden radio signal crackled out from an old army hut on the edge of a partly flooded muddy field - the new art of radio broadcasting had come back to Essex, and Britain gained her voice. The village is called Writtle, the radio station was known by its radio call sign of 2MT, and it made history. The new art of broadcasting had come to Essex and Britain had gained her official voice, but station 2MT was **so** much more than an experimental radio station.

The whole thing was conceived and run by the irrepressible Captain Peter Pendleton Eckersley. A brilliant engineer, 'PPE' and the 2MT team offered listeners comedy sketches, the first ever radio play, dedicated children's spots, impersonations, guest artistes, burlesque, and even parodies of grand opera – he was Britain's first 'DJ' and nothing like it had been heard before. His listeners, estimated at over 20,000 people, loved him, and the station.

Peter's love of 'sound effects' would find him inventing wireless noises, banging half-filled milk bottles, inventing new characters and always singing bad songs, very badly - this was essentially a Goon show some 40 years early. From their chaotic planning meetings in the Cock and Bell Pub and then having to push the pub piano down the narrow muddy lane on a wheelbarrow, it was clear from the outset that 2MT was something different.

In fact, it was so different and so successful that the young Writtle radio engineers' work led to the formation of the London radio station '2LO' and within the year, the British Broadcasting Company. Peter Eckersley quickly became the BBC's first Chief Engineer, and he took most of the Writtle pioneers with him to build the National Broadcasting service from the ground up.

Today, as we fast approach the centenary of the Birth of British Broadcasting it is perhaps a little humbling to think that our entire modern age of broadcasting started in a small hut in Writtle.

Tim Wander is the author of '2MT Writtle—The Birth of British Broadcasting'.

THE RETURN OF BBC THREE



BBC Three returned to TV screens on February 1st, six years after the channel was taken off air and moved online.

Initial viewing figures in its first week on air were 50% lower than those during its final weeks' six years ago, but on a programmes basis, its top two programmes were much more popular among 16-34 year olds than its rivals' programmes. The relaunch night schedule was headlined by new spinoff series *RuPaul's Drag Race UK versus The World*, which brought in an impressive 348,200 viewers (2.43%).

The decision to take the channel off linear TV was taken in 2016 in a bid to attract younger, online audiences, but its popularity among viewers resulted in the broadcaster deciding to bring it back, with a promise to be more representative of all young people than ever before, telling their unfiltered, unapologetic and extraordinary stories from right across the UK.

A LIFELONG LOVE AFFAIR

By Gillian Reynolds CBE

I grew up with the radio. I have a radio in every room. To anyone born into the online world that's weird.

But it goes back to a sunny day in 1939 when my mother called me, aged 4, to stop playing and come into the house. There were Grandma, three aunties, two uncles, my Mum and Dad and our Billy in his pram. All silent, listening to the radio. It was saying we were at war.

After the war, everything changed, even broadcasting. The BBC lost its monopoly. ITV was born in 1955. Eighteen years later Independent Local Radio arrived. It wasn't an instant success. The first two stations, LBC and Capital, tottered. As, initially, did many of the later ILR stations. But, within a decade, they all showed profits and audience loyalty. Fifty years on, British commercial radio, now mainly owned by just three big companies, still claims half the whole UK audience. That's a lot of people. Nine in ten Brits still listen to radio.

Over the past decade, radio's new growth area is online audio. Radio, audio: what's the difference? Online's great attraction is the podcast, programmes made without broadcasting regulations. Anyone can make one and publish it online, free. Put it this way - if radio is *table d'hôte*, audio is *a la carte* - the listener is the scheduler and the choice of what to hear is personal and apparently infinite. And, if subscribers are prepared to pay, possibly profitable.

The BBC saw it coming. BBC Sounds bit deep into radio budgets. Sounds is free. But not, perhaps, forever. If Sounds earned its living by subscription, could it secure BBC Radio's future? Does BBC Radio deserve a future? Yes, because it gives us what the market cannot. Licence fee funding underwrites the Proms, the world's greatest musical showcase, gives opportunities to newcomers in any genre. Not all gambles pay off, but many do, for artist and audience alike. Think of playwright Lee Hall, now internationally famous, (*Billy Elliott* to *Lion King*) first noticed by BBC radio's Kate Rowland, encouraged, supported, commissioned. Remember Sue Townsend's *Adrian Mole*? He wouldn't have existed without BBC Radio's John Tydeman.

Commercial radio spots emergent star presenters - Matt Chorley, *Times* columnist, is unmissable on Times Radio, Nick Ferrari, LBC's breakfast host, became a broadcaster when Kelvin McKenzie hired him and fellow print journalist Nick Banks to energise the old Talk Radio - and they did. Ferrari's market value is now probably even greater than LBC's costly BBC signings, Jon Sopel and Emily Maitlis. But, as they will also make podcasts, that's probably a bet well hedged.

I am not a podcast person. Too much choice. Too many disappointments. I love radio. But when the government and Britain's two most influential newspaper owners show an active interest in the swift death of the BBC, I love BBC radio more than ever.

Gillian Reynolds CBE is a VLV Patron, radio critic, journalist and broadcaster.

DON'T FORGET ABOUT RADIO

By Anthony Wills

It is surprising how often radio is left out of discussions about the licence fee and the future of the BBC. There seems to be a misconception that it comes free of charge, whereas in fact it accounts for approximately 20% of the Corporation's spending.

When you consider the range of programming which it provides, it is truly a bargain and if you do not possess a television receiver you pay nothing: the radio licence fee was abolished in 1971.

At its foundation 100 years ago the BBC was a radio only service, until its first tentative steps into television in 1936 with programmes beamed from Alexandra Palace to a tiny audience in the Home Counties area.

The TV service closed down (with a Mickey Mouse cartoon) at the outbreak of War and resumed in June 1946 (with the same cartoon!). Even in the late 1950s a clerk in the Contracts Department, when negotiating a fee with a well-known celebrity's agent, was overheard saying "*I'm afraid it's only Television!*"

In 1967 the original BBC Home Service, Light Programme and Third Programme became Radios 4, 2 and 3 and a pop music station named Radio 1 was added, plus a chain of BBC local radio stations. The succeeding 55 years have seen an exponential growth in services including 1 Xtra, 4 Extra, 5 Live & Sports Extra, 6 Music and the Asian Service, not to mention a chain of local radio stations.

The BBC is currently making a major effort to emphasize the distinctiveness of its radio output, examples being Radio 1's *Live Lounge* for undiscovered performers, Radio 2's *21st Century Folk*, setting ordinary people's accounts of life in the North East of England to music, and Radio 3's promotion of its BBC Orchestras. Radio 4 is already unparalleled in the range and diversity of its output including, uniquely, comedy and drama. While commercial radio stations have managed to get a foothold in some of the genres that were previously the Corporation's exclusive domain (news, sport, classical music and - above all - pop) they have not managed to match the quality of the BBC's offer. And they have to be funded by advertising, sponsorship or, in a few cases, subscription.

BBC Radio is universally available and - whatever Secretary of State Nadine Dorries may say - it is not technically possible, as things stand, to stream. It remains to be seen how badly its output will be affected by the freezing of the Licence Fee. There are, of course, several possibilities including the closure of one or more of its pop music stations or the axing of some or all of the house orchestras. Radio 4, the most costly of the stations, has already seen a large increase in the number of repeats.

Let's remember that VLV stands for The Voice of the Listener - and the Viewer.

Anthony Wills is a VLV Trustee and former BBC radio producer.

THE CHANGE TO 'VOICE OVER INTERNET PROTOCOL' (VoIP)

By Gordon Drury, VLV member

The way we communicate using the telephone will be changing in December 2025, with the introduction of VoIP – but what is VoIP, what are the changes and how will they affect telecommunications?



VoIP, put simply, enables people to make phone calls using an internet connection, instead of the traditional Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) that's been in place for over a century.

In order to harmonise the whole telecommunications system in the UK, it has been decided that the support facilities for the old PSTN are removed and that speech and other analogue services are transferred to VoIP. This means that all services will be carried from the telephone exchange to homes and businesses, using broadband.

The plan is to complete these changes by December 2025, after which the old PSTN network will not exist and your old analogue handset will not work as it used to.

The "Voice" part of VoIP means speech, utilising your current telephone handset to communicate; "IP" means Internet Protocol, which is the technology system that supports the Internet.

VoIP is a proven technology and already exists in systems that support a speech service that uses a computer or mobile phone, for example with Skype, or WhatsApp. The telephone network/PSTN has historically enabled a connection to be made to a person or business of one's choice, by dialling their subscriber telephone number; that number is unique to the subscriber and may be published in a directory. This telephone number will still be needed after a change to VoIP, so your phone number will not change.

Traditionally, the wire, or landline, that carries the PSTN service into your home, provides a physical means of connecting your home or business to the telecommunications network; there's a dedicated route to the local telephone exchange, where the dialled numbers are translated, so the network can complete a connection. Until the advent of the Internet, only the telephone network existed in order to fulfil this function.

When Internet (broadband) was introduced to homes, it required another signal to be added on top of, and independent of, speech telephony. This meant that the original PSTN service and the broadband service needed to share the wires of the landline, but also needed to remain physically separate; a small filter was connected to the landline socket, in order to separate the two services.

Our core telecoms network – the transmission and switching system – is already digital and has been for many years. With the introduction of VoIP, that transmission core will remain largely in place, but all "traffic" will be formatted and routed as IP; only at the subscriber's landline and handset will the old analogue scheme remain.

A VoIP telephone handset will connect directly into your broadband router, either using an "Ethernet" cable or via Wi-Fi, just like other equipment, such as printers.

Your internet service provider may offer you a VoIP connection, possibly for an additional fee, but it is possible that independent VoIP service providers will also provide handsets, a telephone number (you will be able to use your existing telephone number) and a service, for a fee, in addition to your ISP fees; you should not be required to pay double line rentals. Adapters will connect your existing handset to your existing broadband router – they will be needed to translate all analogue signals, the dialling information as well as the speech and other features of the old PSTN service, into IP.

Openreach is the organisation that operates and maintains the telecommunications network, especially subscriber landlines. They have already begun to convert some areas to VoIP and will have made those subscribers aware of the change.

A cable network – for instance, Virgin Media – is wholly independent of Openreach landlines and may already provide a VoIP telephone service to their customers.

Anyone subscribing to an Internet Service Provider (ISP) for Internet/Broadband services, will probably have a "bundled" PSTN type telephone service included, all covered by the broadband fee. If you no longer have a landline telephone, you will still require a wire to carry the broadband, and so line rental will still be applicable.

When your area becomes liable for the change to VoIP, your internet service provider will be in touch to inform you of your options. If you have no landline service, or telephone number, you need do nothing. All ISPs other than cable operators use the Openreach landline system.

One concern to consider is that when your telephone conversations are integrated with the IP domain they will be just as vulnerable to hacking as anything else in IP, like your computer – this means that identity theft and appropriations of your personal information may become easier for a criminal. Insofar as your ISP will endeavour to protect your traffic, as does the anti-virus software on your PC, you will need to be additionally vigilant to avoid being exploited. Independent VoIP providers will need to provide anti-virus protection, like any other ISP.

The change to VoIP will be implemented gradually, and will not become urgent for 4 years, but December 2025 is the final cut-off date. Just as the Digital Television Freeview switchover took several years to implement, so will this one; an extensive campaign of public information will be required.

There are many online articles about VoIP, such as: www.futureofvoice.co.uk or www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/money-legal/consumer-issues/changes-to-landline-telephones/

'THE BBC: A PEOPLE'S HISTORY'

By Toni Charlton



During a recent Zoom event for a BBC Alumni group, Professor David Hendy talked to Robert Seatter (the Head of BBC History) about his new book, *The BBC—A People's History*.

Robert kicked off the evening by asking David why he had wanted to write a Corporate History of the BBC – following in the legendary footsteps of Asa Briggs and Jean Seaton – and how, practically and logistically, he had gone about tackling

such a mammoth task? After admitting that it was an intimidating challenge, David explained that even though he had read all five volumes of Asa Briggs' History of the BBC, as well as Jean Seaton's different approach in her chapter on the years between 1974 and 1987, he had had to put these to one side and almost forget what they had written in order to force himself "to try and start again from scratch and build the story up from the ground, as if he was coming to it new".

His main challenge was the sheer quantity of output, of people who had worked for the BBC, departments, places – the reach of the BBC is extraordinary. He had to decide what shapes it? What gives it focus? And in the end what had shaped his book was his interest in the BBC-ness of the BBC. He asked himself: "what are the parts of its story that help us in 2022 to understand what the BBC is and why it might be important to sustain it?"

In answer to Robert's question about the title of the book, David went on to reflect upon why it is significant for him:

"It wasn't a title that was there right at the beginning. It evolved ... but *People's History* seemed to have a kind of punchiness to it. And I think in the end there were three interconnected reasons for going with that title; one is actually, in a sense, an urgent political thing ... In recent years – and I think particularly in recent months – one gets the sense that we are dealing with a government that thinks that the BBC belongs to them. And I was very struck that a junior minister, who works with Nadine Dorries, did refer to the BBC specifically as a state broadcaster. And I thought part of the point of the book was to establish that, actually, the BBC is ours. And I say that as a viewer and listener; it is ours. In a deep constitutional sense, it's ours. So that was one reason".

"I think the second reason is something that Asa Briggs said in a new introduction to one of his volumes, which was that in a sense to write the history of broadcasting is to write the history of everything else. In other words, broadcasting is this amazing heist which captures and tries to reflect and tries to feed into culture, art, society, politics and so on. And, of course, we all have our memories of it woven into the fabric of our lives. Our childhood, our growing up, our adulthood life, our daily routines and so on. So, it's ours in that second sense as well". He added, "And then, in the third, and perhaps, in the end, the most important sense, it was I wanted to challenge the idea, which I think is quite widely held ... the BBC is thought of as this sort of rather dignified, formal, monolithic, grand institution.

And, actually, again to introduce that sort of political dimension to this, there have been accusations of

group-think at the BBC. In other words, it is riddled with liberal, metropolitan, consensus sort of attitudes. And it seemed to me, as a historian, digging into the memoirs, the archives, that this was something that was just impossible to sustain. You dig into the BBC – and people who have worked at the BBC know this – there are rivalries, there are differences, there are fierce debates that go on behind every programme. And lots of different cultures within the BBC rather than a unified BBC culture. There might well be an ethos that runs through it and that's a slightly separate point. But I wanted to challenge that I suppose and to do it by going to the programme makers and concentrating on that part of the machine, rather than the high politics, the policies, the committees and so on – to actually deal with the programme makers as human beings, flesh and blood, with passions, with prejudices, with ideals and so on. And to look at the different cultures that emerge as a result of that. And when I say programme makers, I mean that in the broadest sense. So, I am thinking here of the hidden labour that goes into programme making."

Toni Charlton is a VLV trustee. 'The BBC: A People's History', was written by Professor David Hendy.

THE VLV CITIZENS' FORUM UPDATE

By Pip Eldridge

Culture Secretary, Nadine Dorries' announcement in January to freeze the Licence Fee for two years from April 2022 has made explicit the threat to public service broadcasting as a whole.

A wide range of government figures and broadcasters have stood up to ask the public about what they think should happen with the licence fee, with journalists joining in the debate. This has been a real call to action for the VLV Citizens' Forum Project, funded by JRCT.

The initial phase of the project was to reflect on VLV's core mission and aims and develop messaging that could be easily understood by those not familiar with the principles and benefits of public service broadcasting, but without getting bogged down with the complexities and ecology of its delivery.

We will continue to work on this as the world around us is changing so rapidly with the pandemic exacerbating existing inequalities.

We now have confirmed our advisory group of partners and are delighted to welcome the expertise of the British Broadcasting Challenge, the Carnegie UK Trust, the Children's Media Foundation, the Grierson Trust, the International Broadcasting Trust, the Media Reform Coalition, the Sandford St Martin Trust and We Own It.

These organisations are already active in the broadcasting policy citizen debate and have track records working with different, younger, and more diverse audiences than VLV.

To recruit participants to the Citizens Forum we have contacted a wide range of citizen organisations either representing defined protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010 or ones which are nation or region based.

The size of the organisation is not important, the main focus for VLV is that the group is wide-ranging and demonstrates a plurality of citizens. We started running Citizen Forum sessions at the beginning of February.

THE STATE OF BROADCASTING IN SCOTLAND

By Professor Robert Beveridge

The BBC does not just make programmes - it has a set of public purposes of which number 4 states that it should: *reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all the United Kingdom's nations and regions*.

Therefore, the Corporation should help the four nations of the UK to listen to the voices of each nation; difficult when one nation is so much larger than the others, but not impossible. It is reasonable for content to be made in and for each nation, but equally there is a strong case for radio and TV programmes to be made available on the UK network so that viewers and listeners in other parts of these islands can not only be entertained by quality content, but are also informed and educated about partner constituent nations.

How well does the BBC do this? Alas, not well enough. This is not just a matter of reporting of the Scottish Government on the UK news, although the pandemic has required better labelling and comparisons of, for example, differing policies in London and Edinburgh.

It is also about stories. Since 2002, BBC Scotland has broadcast *River City*, a kind of Scottish *East Enders*; a Scottish soap. Over the years this has cost millions of pounds and will continue to do so; yet the BBC does not allow it to be shown on the UK network, although it is on iPlayer. But that is not enough; despite repeated requests to the highest levels of the BBC, over many years, I have never received an adequate explanation for this policy of absence. Why should the BBC not show *River City* on BBC One, even if not during prime time? Why only BBC One Scotland? Would it not be a better return on major investment to make it available to the largest possible audience. *East Enders* is broadcast in Scotland, so why is *River City* not shown in England, and what are the economic and cultural consequences of this? To be fair *Shetland* was on the network, but other series should also be given the same respect, otherwise why make them at all?

For over a decade, BBC Alba has broadcast in Gaelic with subtitles for those who do not speak this important and beautiful language. Subtitling should no longer be a problem for many, as the viewing figures for Scandi-noir indicate. BBC Alba has made many programmes which have achieved critical success and the highest audience appreciation scores. *San Fhuil* (It's in the Blood) was picked up by Polish, Romanian and Croatian broadcasters, while *Port*, the music series presented by acclaimed singers Julie Fowlis and Muireann NicAmhlaoibh, was broadcast in Ukraine, North Macedonia and Cuba.

BBC Alba programmes have sparked wide appeal, with Greece, Bulgaria and Albania all choosing to broadcast Gaelic series. The obvious question is why BBC Alba content made in partnership with MG Alba, cannot be shown on BBC Four or BBC Two, thus widening the appeal and choice of content on those channels and enabling the culture of the Gaels of Scotland to be better appreciated and understood across the British Isles?

It would also be good were Gaelic to be given parity of esteem with Welsh and established on a statutory

basis. Gaelic broadcasting should have PSB status in its own right.

There are strong public purpose and public services reasons for helping the constituent parts of the UK to better hear and see each other. But of course, given the range and intensity of the BBC cuts, consequent upon the Westminster government's imposition of an inadequate licence fee settlement, it makes even more economic sense for the BBC to make the maximum and most efficient use of its budgets.

I therefore make a public and personal appeal to the Board of the BBC to now change and remedy its previous policies which can be said to discriminate against the smaller nations of the UK, in this case, Scotland.

The BBC states (public purpose 4) that,

"it should reflect the diversity of the United Kingdom both in its output and services. In doing so, the BBC should accurately and authentically represent and portray the lives of the people of the United Kingdom today and raise awareness of the different cultures and alternative viewpoints that make up its society; it should ensure that it provides output and services that meet the needs of the United Kingdom's nations, regions and communities. The BBC should bring people together for shared experiences and help contribute to the social cohesion and wellbeing of the United Kingdom".

It is now time to do just that.

Robert Beveridge is a VLV Trustee and Professor of Media Policy and Regulation at the University of Sassari in Sardinia.

VLV AUTUMN CONFERENCE 2021



VLV's annual Autumn Conference was held online on the morning of Wednesday 24th November 2021.

Richard Sharp, Chairman of the BBC, and Maggie Carver CBE, interim Chair of Ofcom, were our keynote speakers. Their sessions were chaired by Janine Gibson and Stewart Purvis CBE respectively.

Our third session focused on the listed events regime, designed to ensure that events of national interest are made widely available to the public. The next bidding rounds for the Olympics, FIFA World Cup and the Euros begin this year so this debate was very timely.

Barbara Slater, Director of Sport at the BBC, Jack Genovese from Ampere Analysis, and John Grogan, former MP for Keighley who submitted a number of Early Day Motions during his time in Parliament about Listed Events, were panellists. This session was chaired by Raymond Snoddy OBE.

Recordings are available on the VLV website: www.vlv.org.uk

VLV 2021 AGM

Due to continuing coronavirus constraints, the 2021 AGM was held online via Zoom on 2nd December 2021.

The VLV Annual Report and Accounts for year ending 31st May 2021 were reviewed and approved.

Colin Browne, Mary Dixon and Peter Gordon were re-appointed as Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer.

Toni Charlton and Sue Washbrook were elected as Trustees, while Alan Barlow, Robert Beveridge and Anthony Wills were re-elected for a second 3 year term.

After the formal business the meeting discussed the work of the VLV and the way ahead on the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT) project.

THE VLV AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN BROADCASTING - VOTE NOW!

Enclosed with this bulletin are ballot papers for the VLV Awards for Excellence in Broadcasting for VLV members, covering programmes broadcast during 2021.

After two years when Covid-19 restrictions ruled out a physical awards ceremony, this year, now that Covid restrictions have been lifted, we will present the awards, in person, at a ceremony at the Geological Society's rooms at Burlington House, London, on 23rd June 2022; we hope you will join us in this celebration.

The VLV Awards are an opportunity to celebrate the wealth of excellent programmes broadcast during 2021, across all channels and networks; this quality and diversity is reflected in the range of nominations made by VLV members.

Winners particularly value these awards, first introduced some 30 years ago, because they are chosen by the people who really matter, their listeners and viewers.

Please take a few minutes to vote for those programmes and individuals you particularly appreciated during 2021. You have until 8th April 2022 to return your completed ballot papers, by post or by email to info@vlv.org.uk

Diary Dates

VLV's 39th Spring Conference

Wednesday 27th April 2022
10.30am-13.00pm
Online

VLV Awards

23rd June 2022
Geological Society, London

VLV's 39th Autumn Conference

22nd November 2022
Geological Society, London

We will announce other events during the coming months.

Watch out for email updates and visit the VLV website www.vlv.co.uk for further details.

Keeping up to date

VLV sends out regular updates by email - please ensure that Lucy in the VLV office info@vlv.co.uk has your up to date email address. You can keep up to date with all the latest VLV news at www.vlv.org.uk



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