



Voice of the Listener & Viewer

Championing Excellence and Diversity in Broadcasting

Spring 2023

Bulletin 134

BETTER CITIZEN CONSULTATION NEEDED ON BROADCASTING

The BBC, alongside ITV, is the most trusted news brand in the UK according to The Reuters Institute, but worryingly it has seen a 20% drop in trust since 2018 to only 55%. This echoes the 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer which shows a decline in 'public faith in societal institutions triggered by economic anxiety, disinformation, mass-class divide and a failure of leadership [which] has brought us to where we are today – deeply and dangerously polarized'.

In this context VLV believes that the need for high quality Public Service Broadcasting, and especially the BBC, is greater than ever. But the challenge for our broadcasters is how to restore public trust?

As the BBC faces a barrage of criticism for a perceived lack of impartiality, cuts to services and the background of its Chairman, VLV believes it would be in the corporation's interest to get public buy-in to its strategy. It faces a government review into its funding model which could mean it becoming a subscription service, something the VLV opposes because this would undermine its existing mission and the universality of British PSB will be lost. VLV sees effective consultation as a key means to restore trust. Ofcom, broadcasters and the Government should better encourage the public to be part of a well-informed debate.

Since the BBC Trust was disbanded the number of responses to consultations has plummeted because of lack of publicity when surveys are run. In 2015, for example, there were more than 40,000 responses to the BBC Trust consultation on Charter Review. Now BBC and Ofcom consultations attract very few responses – 25 were sent in to the last BBC consultation. While some consultations, such as the one on Channel 4 Privatisation, elicit thousands of responses this has been due to the work of organisations such as 38 Degrees which provide recommendations of how people should respond. As a result, these responses tend to be disregarded by Government because they are not considered independent.

VLV is considering how best to ensure that citizen views are properly represented in the debate about PSB and BBC. We are seeking funding to establish a Citizen Assembly to consider the best funding model for the BBC which will influence the whole PSB ecology. We believe that it is crucial that independent research is conducted as part of the BBC Funding Review.

VLV SPRING CONFERENCE

Thursday, 11th May 2023
10.00am - 4.00pm

VLV will hold its Spring Conference on 11th May 2023, at The Geological Society, Piccadilly, London.



Official portraits -UK Parliament

We are delighted that **the Rt Hon Baroness Stowell of Beeston MBE PC, Chair of the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee**, and **Charlotte Moore, Chief Content Officer, BBC**, will be keynote speakers at the VLV Spring Conference 2023.

Lord Hall CBE, former Director General of the BBC, will also be in conversation with Colin Browne, Chairman of VLV. Further speakers to be announced in due course.

Please **book your place at: www.vlv.org.uk/upcoming-events/vlv-spring-conference-2023** or **complete a booking form (enclosed)**, or call the VLV office **01474 338716**.

SAVE THE DATE: 29TH NOVEMBER 2023 THE VLV AWARDS

The VLV Awards for Excellence ceremony will be held at the Geological Society, London, on Wednesday, 29th November 2023, alongside the Autumn Conference. We hope you will be able to join us.

The VLV Awards are an opportunity to celebrate the wealth of excellent programmes broadcast during 2022, across all channels and networks.

Ballot papers for the Awards are included with this Bulletin for members; information about how to vote can also be found on the back page. Details of how to book your place will be announced in due course.

Bulletin Spring 2023



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VLV Office

The Old Rectory Business Centre
Springhead Road
Northfleet
Kent DA11 8HN

Tel: 01474 338716

e-mail: info@vlv.org.uk



Office Hours: Tues, Weds, Thurs
9.30am - 2.30 pm

Sophie Chalk
Lucy Regan
Website

Policy Advisor
Administrator
www.vlv.org.uk

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 2023 Bulletin.



As I write this letter, the dominating story in the media for several days has been a tweet by Gary Lineker about the Government's plans to curb illegal immigration.

Whatever one's views of Lineker's sentiments, the focus of attention on them has been extraordinary – and greeted with some bewilderment by commentators around the world. The reason, of course, is that while

Lineker was tweeting under his own name and is not a member of BBC staff, he is seen as inseparable from the organisation that has employed him as a presenter for so many years; and the BBC occupies a unique and vital place in the nation's psyche. It is, in a sense, a tribute to that role that Lineker's comments have engendered such a furious debate.

BBC Chairman Richard Sharp and Director-General Tim Davie have emphasised political impartiality as a cornerstone of the BBC's philosophy. Balancing that requirement without unreasonably inhibiting freedom of expression has always been tricky; social media has greatly exacerbated the problem. While strict guidelines for staff in news and current affairs are generally understood and accepted, it becomes much more complicated in respect of those working elsewhere in the Corporation. There has been, perhaps understandably, an element of fudge in the guidance in that area. This is now to be reviewed by the BBC. It will not be easy to come up with a solution that satisfies all parties.

While Public Service Broadcasting faces many challenges, there is also much to welcome. We are pleased that the Government has abandoned its plans to privatise Channel Four. The VLV campaigned strongly against that, and it is good that we and many others in the sector were eventually listened to by the Government.

ITV has launched its exciting new digital service, ITVX. Channel 5 continues to produce much excellent programming. Freeview has re-launched as Everywhere TV, committed to ensure the PSBs are universally available, free to air.

However, we still await the much anticipated – and much delayed – Media Bill, which it is hoped will include important measures to support PSB. We are also no nearer hearing how the Government proposes to address the review of how the BBC should be funded. The VLV has been pressing strongly for much wider public and parliamentary involvement in this process. There must not be another behind closed doors settlement between the Government and the BBC. There is also, we believe, a strong case for reviewing the process for the appointment of BBC Chairmen, and to introduce greater transparency, in order to avoid the damaging controversies that have surrounded the appointment of Richard Sharp.

More generally, this need for greater public debate and consultation in decisions affecting the sector is a key focus of VLV's activities, whether it's Ofcom and Government decisions directed at the broadcasters or decisions by the broadcasters themselves – particularly service cuts by the BBC. You will read much about this elsewhere in the Bulletin, including in our lead story and a piece by our new Patron, Roger Bolton.

Finally, you will see details in this Bulletin of our Spring Conference. I think we have an exciting agenda lined up and I really look forward to seeing as many as possible of you in person. And, of course, don't forget to vote in our Annual Awards – voting papers for members are enclosed.

Colin Browne,
Chairman of VLV

VLV POLICY UPDATE

The two current most important policy interventions, the Media Bill and BBC Review, have been delayed again by the recent Cabinet reshuffle, however, VLV has remained busy, planning our response to both, and responding to other consultations.

BBC Regulation

The removal of many of the BBC's quotas are going ahead, with the BBC due to publish its 2023-4 targets in its Annual Plan in April. It will report back on its performance in summer of 2024. VLV opposed the relaxation of quotas and we want Ofcom to monitor the BBC's output to ensure that delivery of 'at risk' genres is maintained.

Ofcom: Preparations for the World Radiocommunications Conference (WRC) 2023

The WRC is held every three to four years. Spectrum management is on the agenda this year. VLV urges Ofcom to protect the provision of spectrum for Digital Terrestrial TV so audiences can continue to enjoy free to air television and radio services.

Ofcom: Regulating advertising on public service channels

Existing advertising rules are stricter for the PSB channels (ITV, STV, C4, C5 and S4C) than they are for other channels. The challenge is to maintain the quality of viewing experience for audiences while ensuring the commercial PSBs remain financially sustainable. VLV recommends a 'middle way', potentially increasing advertising on the PSBs but not to the level seen on non-PSB channels.

DCMS Review of Listed Events Regime

The government is considering updating the regime, so it includes digital rights. Currently legislation only guarantees that Listed Events are shown on TV but as more people stream content digitally it is important digital rights are included. Time-shifted viewing is particularly valuable when events are held in different time zones, such as the Olympics.

Ofcom: BBC request to change the BBC Operating Licence

VLV supports some of the BBC's requests but not all of them. We support a small reduction of live news and current affairs on Radio 5 Live, a new level of new live music on BBC Radio 2 and a number of changes to News quotas all of which we believe will not impact adversely on audiences. We do not however agree with a reduction of national and regional non-news opt out programming.

Ofcom Consultation on how it regulates the BBC's impact on competition

While VLV largely supports Ofcom's recommendations which should make BBC competition assessments more transparent and streamlined, VLV recommends that Ofcom and the BBC should make far greater effort to publicise consultations to citizens. Since 2017 the number of responses to consultations about the BBC has declined significantly.

NEW SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DCMS



Official portrait -UK Parliament

The Rt Hon Lucy Frazer KC MP was appointed Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on 7 February 2023.

Replacing Michelle Donelan, Lucy Frazer was previously Minister of State in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities from 26 October 2022 to 7 February 2023.



NEW VLV TRUSTEE

We are delighted to welcome a new trustee to the Board of the VLV, voted in at the AGM on 22 November 2022.

Andrew Board is already well known to VLV members, having previously served as a trustee in 2016/2017.

Andrew spent much of his career at BT and was a member of the Ofcom Advisory Committee for Wales from 2017 to 2020. Andrew is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and was the Chairman of RSA Wales Cymru from 2012-2014.

Professor Sarita Malik was re-elected as trustee, for another three-year term.

We thank Professor Bob Usherwood and Professor Jeanette Steemers, who have stepped down as trustees after two three-year terms; we are deeply appreciative of their expertise and years of service to The Voice of the Listener & Viewer.

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.

BBC BIAS CHALLENGED



It's often used as an argument in the BBC's favour that since both sides of the political spectrum frequently complain about it being biased, this demonstrates it is achieving impartiality.

In recent years, the relationship between government and the BBC has been particularly fraught. Those considered to be the more right-wing members of the Conservative party have been particularly vocal.

Patrick Barwise and Peter York, co-authors of *The War Against the BBC*, recently published an article in *Prospect* quoting right-leaning critics of the Corporation who claim that its left-wing/pro-Labour bias is clear, obvious and increasingly alienating the British public. Patrick and Peter's article refutes these claims using a range of evidence which is interesting.

First, content analysis by Cardiff University found the BBC's news coverage in 2009 and 2015 to have been marginally supportive of the governments of the day in both years but slightly *more* so under Conservatives in 2015 than under Labour in 2009 – the opposite of the 'left-wing BBC' narrative. A second study by two London-based academics of the BBC's daily TV show *The Papers* similarly shows a right-leaning bias in both the guests and the articles discussed.

However, according to Patrick and Peter, *'The BBC's right-leaning critics would doubtless dismiss these studies on the basis that the authors were metropolitan media academics and therefore, like everyone at the BBC, card-carrying – perhaps even tofu-eating – members of the left-liberal "anti-growth coalition". Much more problematic for the right-wing Beeb-bashers is that most of the public disagrees with them.'*

The last point, about the public, is supported by a recent YouGov public opinion tracker from November 2022. This shows that *only 22 per cent* agreed that the BBC's news coverage is biased to the left; almost as many (18 per cent) said it is biased to the right and everyone else – a clear majority – either said it is balanced or "Don't know" (which is pretty much the same).

The full article is available to read here:

<https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/politics/we-have-bad-news-for-the-right-wing-bbc-haters-most-of-the-public-just-dont-agree-with-you>

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'

IS IT OUR BBC?

By Roger Bolton

Whenever the BBC wants something from Government or the Regulator, and is seeking public support, it often uses the slogan 'It's Your BBC'. But is it true, and are those who run it really accountable to those who pay for it via the licence fee? 'No taxation without representation' is an age-old political principle. Does it apply to the Corporation?

The Radio 4 series *Feedback*, which I presented for over 20 years, is supposed to be one of the ways the organisation makes itself accountable, but my experience suggests that many in the BBC, particularly among its executives, pay lip service to that principle of accountability, while some of its journalists, producers and presenters are willing, indeed eager, to explain themselves.

The executives' excuses for not appearing have a wearisome familiarity: "It's not the right time"; to which my reply is, "The right time is for listeners and viewers to decide". "The critics aren't representative"; my response is, "How do you know? Anyway, minorities have a right to ask questions". "We will do an interview in the next series"; but when the next series comes round the same answer is given, making it feel like Groundhog Day.

In my time, the BBC insisted that *Feedback* producers should go through the press office in the search for interviewees. I suspect that, on many occasions, the request was not passed on.

There were exceptions. Mark Thompson, when Director General, appeared, the only one to do so in my time, as did Sir Michael Lyons, when Chairman, again the only one to do so. The departing Controller of Radio 3, Alan Davey, was another who 'got it', but they are the exceptions.

The BBC, under great financial pressure, is now cutting services, but is not required to consult us. If it wants our support, it had better do so.

Roger Bolton is a VLV Patron, former Presenter of 'BBC's Feedback', and now presents the podcast 'Roger Bolton's Beebwatch' - see page 11.

CHANNEL 4 UPDATE

In January, former culture secretary, Michelle Donelan, reversed the government's controversial and unpopular proposal to sell and privatise Channel 4.



Instead, she set out a package of reforms intended to secure the broadcaster's long-term financial sustainability and future viability.

One of the most notable of these reforms was the relaxation of C4's publisher-broadcaster model, allowing Channel 4 to produce and own some of its programming, meaning the broadcaster will be able to reduce dependence on advertising revenue.

It's understood that the government has already started TV industry discussions about the reforms.

“OPEN COMPETITION” AND THE BBC

By Richard Ayre



At the very best Richard Sharp showed a worrying failure of judgement when he helped a rich friend bail out Boris Johnson's finances at the very time Johnson was considering Sharp for Chairman of the BBC.

According to the Royal Charter the Chair's appointment "may only be made following a fair and open competition". Yet Sharp was already a personal friend of the PM; he was working next door in Number 11 when someone suggested he might like to run the BBC; and by Sharp's own account he popped next door to tell Johnson he wanted the job. This was hardly the level of access afforded other candidates, of whom we now know there were four who were interviewed by a panel and every one of them judged appointable. Yet Johnson chose Sharp. The PM, of course, had a clear conflict of interest himself and by any normal standard of propriety he should have played no part in the BBC appointment from the very moment he allowed Sharp to put him in touch with a source of personal finance. But then even Johnson's biggest fans would never argue he was a slave to ethics.

VLV members will be all too aware that there's nothing new about politicians putting their friends in to "sort out" the BBC. For most of the past hundred years a group of political appointees (originally governors and latterly trustees) had oversight of the Corporation while a separate board of senior BBC staff led by the director general actually ran the business. But there was a golden opportunity to change that formula in 2015 when the government asked a banker called Sir David Clementi to recommend a new model for running the Corporation. It was clear to those of us around him that Clementi was determined to follow the practice in the commercial world of having a single "unitary" board responsible for everything the BBC does, with its chair and most of its members being outsiders. I was one of those who tried to convince him of the danger of allowing political appointees to run a Corporation committed to impartiality, and his final report did include the option of Board appointments being made independent of political involvement. But it was an option he did not recommend.

Instead he invited Ministers to decide whether they preferred to maintain their rights of patronage. You can guess their decision. And you may remember who they then chose as the first Chairman of the new BBC Board: Sir David Clementi.

As it stands today, five members of the BBC Board are chosen by politicians following a "fair and open competition". Another five are chosen by the Board itself through a Committee, a majority of whose members are – you guessed right again – those who have been chosen by the politicians. Then there are just four members of BBC staff, headed by the Director General. That's four out of fourteen.

Though the DG is the editor-in-chief with "final responsibility" for editorial matters, the Charter says he is "accountable to the Board for (his) individual decisions". No wonder there have been reliable reports of political appointees on the board putting pressure on the DG over political coverage. As licence-fee payers we owe a big debt to the resilience of Tim Davie in standing his ground as editor-in-chief.

The Sharp affair simply highlights an entire public appointments process that is plainly unfit for purpose. Many hundreds of people are placed into paid positions on public bodies because they have been chosen by politicians following "open" recruitment that everyone involved knows is open to manipulation. I have been one of them on several occasions and I can't honestly say that I'm certain I was ever appointed solely on merit.

As you can well imagine, there is no political will to change the system. But change it must.

Richard Ayre is former Head of BBC Westminster in the final year of Mrs Thatcher's premiership, then controller of editorial policy for John Birt. After leaving the BBC he chaired Ofcom's editorial standards committee, and then the BBC Trust. Richard now chairs the press regulator IMPRESS

ITVX LAUNCH

ITVX launched its 'UK's freshest streaming service' ad campaign on 8



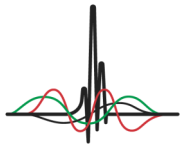
December 2022, announcing the new streaming service that replaces the ITV Hub. It has become the new ITV home for streaming 10,000 hours of free shows, such as *A Spy Among Friends*, *Without Sin* and *Riches*.

ITVX KIDS TO REPLACE CITV

ITV has announced that, in response to the changing ways children and their parents are accessing content, it will close its children's channel, CITV, after 17 years. In its place, its streaming service, ITVX, will launch a children's streaming base, called ITVX Kids, offering all of ITV's content for 6-12 year olds in one 'kid-safe' place. ITV will, however, retain the LittleBe segment on ITVBe and some pre-school programming on ITV2. ITVX Kids will launch in Summer 2023.

THE BATTLE FOR FREEVIEW

By Phil Harding



ITUWRC
DUBAI 2023

Later this year thousands of business people, diplomats, politicians, engineers and

technicians from 193 countries will descend on the Gulf state of Dubai for a meeting that could have a massive impact on how many of us live our lives.

At first sight, the World Radiocommunication Conference of The International Telecommunication Union doesn't sound like the stuff of revolutions, but the outcomes of this gathering could dramatically change how we get our news, how we are entertained, even how we get life-saving emergency messages. At stake are resources worth billions of dollars to giant corporations. This conference will see some very hard-fought battles.

At the centre of the debate is something called the radio frequency spectrum. It's something most of us will know very little about but which we use every day. The spectrum is made up of the invisible radio frequencies that wireless signals travel over. Those signals enable us to watch tv, listen to the radio, and do just about everything on our mobile devices. That's why Dubai matters.

The spectrum is a finite resource. Put two signals on the same frequency and there is interference and no one can see or hear anything. Managing radio spectrum is a complex activity. It involves taking decisions years in advance. As mobile devices become more and more sophisticated the big mobile phone companies become ever hungrier for more and more spectrum. The competition to use the spectrum is becoming ever more intense especially as the demand for bulk mobile data is ever growing.

How might the future use of the spectrum affect all of us? At the moment, most of us get our tv and radio in one of two ways: either from the airwaves via a tv aerial (that's digital terrestrial television known to most of us as Freeview) or from the internet via a connection or wi-fi. Currently, we can choose either or both.

But some have begun to question whether in the future the spectrum should be used for broadcasting at all. The UK government has ordered a review. The mobile phone companies obviously have a commercial interest in booting-off the broadcasters, but others have also begun to argue that it's a more efficient use of the resource. It could also mean that broadcasters could offer more to their internet users. In a recent speech the BBC Director General Tim Davie argued that the BBC moving to an internet- only distribution system would enable it to provide a better more customized service to the public.

Broadcast switch-off would mean the end of Freeview. You would need an internet or cable connection to watch the BBC or ITV or Channel 4 or 5. In the UK, free public access to the internet is still limited so that usually means paying an internet service provider. 1.5 million homes in the UK still don't have access to the internet. Though that number is dropping it's still a lot of people, many of them older or poorer viewers unable or unwilling to pay for the internet.

In this debate, access and cost are key issues. One of the core concepts of public service television is the universal availability of national and regional TV services with a wide selection of high-quality original programming. Currently, DTT/Freeview is the only television platform that can deliver near universal coverage (98.5% of the UK). In contrast, satellite (whether Sky or Freesat) is unlikely to ever achieve above 95% coverage and would require everyone to have a satellite dish or receiver. Turning off Freeview tomorrow would leave a lot of screens blank.

In addition, there are other powerful logistical and security arguments against a swift broadcast switch off. Broadcasting is a vital part of our national infrastructure. Should we have our communications totally dependent on the internet? As we have seen recently, powerful hack attacks can bring down even the most sophisticated internet systems. What if our internet were compromised by the destruction of the satellites and the cables it depends on? In a time of crisis, how would a government get its crucial messages out? There are powerful arguments for maintaining alternative means of distribution. That means DTT for TV and FM for radio. It's a matter of national resilience and it would be a foolish government or regulator which ignored this.

It is unlikely that the Dubai conference will lead to an immediate switch-off but it will take decisions that could have very important longer-term consequences stretching well into the next decade. These are decisions that could come back to haunt us. Once DTT spectrum has been allocated to mobile there is no going back. Everyone needs to watch Dubai very closely.

More information about the conference can be found at <https://www.itu.int/wrc-23/>

Phil Harding is a journalist, broadcaster and works as consultant with media groups on topics such as public broadcasting in the digital age. Previously he worked at the BBC, including Editor of the Today programme, Controller of Editorial Policy and Director of News at the World Service.

BROADCAST 2040+ UPDATE

Fellow Broadcast 2040+ campaign coalition member, Silver Voices - which represents older people, many of whom rely on Freeview and radio for entertainment and to feel connected to society - recently launched a petition calling on government to guarantee access to broadcast TV and radio beyond 2040.

The petition received over 10,000 signatures, gaining support from viewers and listeners across all four nations of the United Kingdom. There's now a push to reach 100,000 signatures, meaning that it will be considered for debate in Parliament.

The Government's current policy means Freeview services are only guaranteed until the early 2030s. The Broadcast 2040+ campaign, of which VLV is a coalition member, was set up to protect these services to 2040 and beyond.

To sign the petition, go to: <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/630957/signatures/new>

A NEW MEDIA FOR A NEW BRITAIN?

By **Debs Grayson**, the Media Reform Coalition, responding to the Brown Commission.

In late 2022, the Commission on the UK's Future, led by Gordon Brown, published *A New Britain: Renewing our Democracy and Rebuilding our Economy*. The report gave us our first substantial insights into what Labour Party policy on constitutional reform might look like in the next general election and contains some welcome proposals for Lords reform and further devolution from Westminster.

There are also some significant omissions, including no mention of proportional representation, or of the Community Wealth Building which has been successfully implemented by Labour councils in places like Preston, even though the report describes a near identical model of combining democratic and economic renewal.

Another notable absence is any discussion of the media, besides a few brief mentions of media industries as sites for investment. Yet our media are both a major driver of the problems the report identifies within the UK's democratic structures, and an essential place to look for solutions.

The Media Reform Coalition has long argued that democratic reform and media reform are intrinsically connected, and any project to transform the country's constitution must recognise this or face significant headwinds. For example, the Brown Commission proposes a number of measures to 'rebuild trust' in politicians and political institutions – but these will undoubtedly be undermined if we don't also address the rampant political polarisation, misinformation and demonisation of minorities across our media landscape.

Similarly, the Commission talks extensively about the problems caused by the concentration of political power in Westminster, but without recognising that this is paralleled by the concentration of media power in our national newspapers and broadcasters. The Commission's plans to cede that power to the devolved nations, English regions and local communities must be accompanied by a devolution of communicative infrastructures – in particular, measures to address the catastrophic loss of high-quality local news over the past 20 years.

The consequences of devolving formal political power without also devolving communicative power are well illustrated within Wales. Since the Welsh Assembly was founded in 1999, public knowledge of it – and participation in its elections – have remained stubbornly low.

The pandemic was the first time that the BBC and other national media had to routinely platform the Welsh First Minister, and systematically explain to audiences that there were different rules in operation for Wales, being created by an institution outside Westminster.

As a result, Mark Drakeford became the most recognised First Minister in the history of the Senedd, although participation in the 2022 elections still slightly declined. This example makes it clear that new institutions and new powers by themselves won't generate trust, engagement – or even recognition – without a media infrastructure which communicates their purpose and actions and holds them to account.

The BBC has a crucial role here, given its constitutional remit to represent all communities of the UK. The high proportion of people across the country who feel 'invisible' to politicians, as identified by the Brown Commission, indicates that the BBC is failing in this part of its job.

This failure will undoubtedly be exacerbated by cuts to services currently being planned, such as reductions in local radio provision and services for Black and Asian audiences, as well as by creeping commercialisation as BBC studios takes in more of the institution's operations. The fact that these changes are happening without even any consultation – let alone giving the public any democratic decision-making power – will surely exacerbate many people's sense that they are being ignored by London elites.

The problems with our media system are multifaceted, and many will require new thinking and long-term transnational solutions e.g. to address the power of the Big Tech monopolies. There is an understandable hesitancy from the Labour leadership about directly challenging the power held by legacy and tech media corporations. Essential reforms such as bringing in caps on media ownership, committing to holding part 2 of the Leveson inquiry, or enforcing effective regulation of the press, would all require a more confrontational stance than the current Labour leadership seem likely to take. But even a more cautious incoming government could take steps to make our media system more capable of supporting democratic renewal.

They could invest in alternative media infrastructure underpinned by civic, non-commercial values, by increasing the support available to community radio stations, and implementing the recommendations of several government reports to establish a £10 million a year fund to support public interest journalism.

For the BBC, they could build on VLV's Citizens Forums and the Institute of Welsh Affairs' recent Citizens Panel, to establish a full-scale Citizens Assembly to examine the future purpose, remit and structure of the BBC in the digital age. This could also consider where editorial and budgeting decision-making should sit to support the wider devolution of powers from central government proposed by the Commission.

At our Media Democracy Festival (25th March), the Media Reform Coalition will launch a new membership model and setting up regular meetings to dig deeper into these policy questions.

We will continue collaborating closely with VLV and would welcome input from the wider VLV membership as we develop our policy platform for the 2024 election.

At a time when the basic tenets of democracy are under threat, fighting for a media system with democratic values at its heart has never been more urgent.

Debs Grayson is Campaign Coordinator for 'The BBC and Beyond' at The Media Reform Coalition <https://www.mediareform.org.uk/>

100 YEARS OF THE BBC IN WALES

By Andrew Board



From its new £120M 'state-of-the-art' studios & HQ in central Cardiff, BBC Cymru Wales has just celebrated 100 years of radio and television broadcasting in Wales. This 'tempestuous journey'* started modestly, at 5pm on 13th February 1923, from a small studio near Cardiff Castle; later that evening, baritone Mostyn Thomas made history by singing 'Dafyd y Garreg Wen', which was the first traditional Welsh folk song ever transmitted live.

While this inauspicious start to broadcasting in Wales had just a few thousand listeners around Cardiff and South Wales, it heralded the start of many years' controversy and debate over what could and should be heard and viewed in Wales.

Worth noting is that the first ever Welsh broadcast came just 3 years after the Church of England was disestablished in Wales, following pressure from the non-conformist community and support from the former Welsh Liberal Prime Minister; Wales created the Church in Wales, and appointed its own Archbishop, in 1920. In 1925, the first ever Welsh language church service was broadcast from Swansea. These events illustrated the desire in many sections of Welsh society to highlight and preserve Welsh culture and language, amid concerns that the 'wireless' era and BBC central policy might erode traditional Welsh values and way of life.

30 years later, in 1953, with the building of the Wenvoe transmitter in the Vale of Glamorgan, TV transmission from Wales started. But, as this service covered Wales and the West of England, the debate continued about representation and portrayal of Welsh life and culture in an essentially English language dominated medium. This situation can be viewed in much the same way as the spread of imported film and television programmes from the United States in the 1960's and '70's being criticised for 'Americanizing' the British way of life.

However, it was the 1964 Pilkington Report which can be directly associated with the formation of BBC Cymru Wales. This government sponsored commission on the future of broadcasting in the UK made regional representation important and gave national recognition to Wales and Scotland, ultimately leading to the creation of Radio Wales and Radio Cymru and paving the way for a TV service in Wales.

As a backdrop to the Pilkington report, a defining moment for the Welsh language came in 1962 when 'Tynged yr Iaith' (Fate of the language) was presented as a BBC radio lecture by Saunders Lewis.

Many have attributed this event to the formation of the Welsh Language Society (Cymdeithas yr Iaith Cymraeg) whose members then famously took direct action to have English and Welsh language parity on road signs and other buildings and ensure survival of the Welsh language.

BBC Cymru Wales moved to Broadcasting House, Llandaff in 1966, the same year as the Severn Bridge opening which, ironically, brought England physically closer to Wales, but ensured that Welsh identity would have a permanent voice. S4C, which is the exclusively Welsh language TV Station came into existence in 1982, at the same time as Channel 4, and now boasts the longest running soap in the UK - Pobl y Cwm (People of the Valley).

Controversially, the iconic old BBC building and studios were demolished to make way for a development of 400 new houses, in a part of Cardiff that suffers from chronic congestion; the new, Broadcasting House sits on the site of the former bus station, next to Cardiff Central Station. The city planners deemed that a central bus station was no longer required, a curious decision in an age when public transport is so heavily promoted.

BBC Cymru Wales made its first live transmission from its multi award winning new HQ and studios, on 14th July 2020, and the first radio transmission followed 2 weeks later. S4C moved permanently into the Central Square studios in January 2021, from where it runs all its TV and other operations.

In December 2021 Welsh Labour and Plaid Cymru announced a joint agreement to draw up plans for devolution of broadcasting under a new shadow authority. How this might work in practice or be funded remains to be seen.

The Institute of Welsh Affairs is holding an event to discuss media regulation in Wales and who should hold those powers - so the debate continues. (See Dylan Moore's article on page 9).

Currently, it is believed that S4C and BBC Cymru Wales operate on a budget of approximately £150M per annum, compared to an estimated annual budget of £88M for BBC Scotland.

The 100 year celebrations are marked by an exhibition, 'BBC 100 in Wales', at the National Museum, Cardiff, running until April 2023.

As well as showcasing Welsh-made productions like Casualty, Doctor Who and Super Ted, the exhibition concludes that, without doubt, the preservation of Welsh tradition and language has gone hand-in-hand with the growth of broadcasting, and that it ultimately owes a debt to the BBC, but mostly to the myriad of campaigners who lobbied both central government and the BBC for recognition of Welsh culture.

* 'Tempestuous journey' is the title of the first biography of Welsh Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, who was a supporter of the disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales and a keen nationalist. We can only wonder what he might think today!

Andrew Board is a VLV Trustee and former member of the Ofcom Wales Advisory Board.

LEADING WELSH THINK TANK SAYS BROADCASTING SHOULD BE DEVOLVED

By Dylan Moore

The Institute of Welsh Affairs (IWA) has called for broadcasting powers to be devolved from Westminster to an independent commission representative of the four nations of the United Kingdom.



In its [report](#) *Broadcasting Regulation in Wales*, launched last week, Wales' leading think tank also encourages the Welsh Government to set up an Institute for Media – to put the voices of citizens and audiences at the centre of conversations about what we watch and how we watch it.

The IWA's intervention comes at a significant time in the ongoing debates about the future of broadcasting at both ends of the M4.

While the UK Government White Paper *Up Next* published last year identifies the main threat to the future of public service broadcasting in the rapid technological shifts that now see young people in particular accessing the majority of their television-like content digitally via online platforms and streaming services, the Welsh (Labour) Government have been explicit in identifying the Tories in Westminster as the major problem.

Announcing an Expert Panel to look at the issues in June 2022, the Welsh Government Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport Dawn Bowden said that: 'Ongoing threats to, and attacks on, public service broadcasting from the UK Government, and recent announcements by UK Ministers about the future of the BBC licence fee and Channel 4 privatisation, strengthen the case that the current system is flawed.'

As part of the Welsh Government's Co-operation Agreement with Plaid Cymru, Bowden said the Expert Panel would recommend changes to the frameworks around broadcasting to make them 'fit for purpose' and 'meet Wales' needs'.

The new IWA report directly addresses some of the questions currently under the Expert Panel's consideration and also echoes some of the recommendations of a 2021 report by the Senedd's Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee.

Its recommendation to devolve broadcasting – not directly to Welsh Government, but rather to an independent commission comprising representatives from all four UK nations – is based on a series of case studies from across Europe.

The report is co-authored by the think tank's own Policy Lead on Media and Democracy, Dylan Moore and researchers from Cardiff University's Creative Economy Unit, Dr Marlen Komorowski and Enrique Uribe-Jongbloed, who apply their expert knowledge of the regulatory landscapes in Spain, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands to draw down lessons for Wales.

From Germany arises the principle that if broadcasting powers are devolved, agreements and bodies can be put into place to streamline regulation and policy across different nations and regions, as well as the fact decisions about content and funding for public service broadcasting ceded by central government do not necessarily have to be devolved directly to the governments of devolved nations, but can be 'pooled' within independent bodies to allow greater transparency, shared responsibility and distance from political interference.

In Spain the research team found that 'regional' regulators can coexist with a single national regulator, and therefore any new 'Broadcasting Authority for Wales' would not necessarily have to compete with or duplicate the work of Ofcom, but could be afforded a specific remit to specifically strengthen democracy in Wales.

Meanwhile, Belgium served as a cautionary tale for Wales, with broadcasting powers divided along linguistic lines, leading to completely separate media markets and subsequent fragmentation in the population. Similarly, the Netherlands case study demonstrated the threat to funding settlements for broadcasters such as S4C when power over broadcasting policy is retained centrally as it is in the UK.

Making comparisons with other small nations – and in the case of Spain autonomous regions like Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque Country – allowed the IWA to develop a series of principles on which their recommendations are based. One of these is the idea that decisions about Wales' broadcasting landscape should be made in Wales, a principle that can be easily transferred across all UK nations.

Wales' Expert Panel will be submitting their report in May. The IWA say they want to prevent a 'tug of war' between Cardiff Bay and Westminster. But with a General Election around the corner, anybody interested in furthering the voice of the listener and viewer across these islands would be well advised to keep an eye on developments in Wales.

The *Broadcasting Regulation in Wales* report can be read at www.iwa.wales/wp-content/media/IWA_Broadcasting-Regulation-Part-2-3_FINAL-2.pdf

Dylan Moore is Media and Democracy Policy Lead and Editor of 'the welsh agenda'.

VLV ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY

By Pip Eldridge

INTO FILM

As part of our public engagement activity, VLV has been working with 'Into Film', the leading charity for film in education. Working across the UK, Into Film supports educators to unlock the power of film, to deliver transformative learning outcomes for children and young people aged 5-19.

Into Film engages regularly with its Youth Advisory Council, with members aged 10-18, from across the UK; this group of passionate young people provide feedback to help shape the Into Film programme, as well as opportunities to get involved in lots of other industry related opportunities.

VLV has supported recent meetings, asking YAC members to consider the value of public service broadcasting and what it means to them. Here are some of the young people's observations on whether the BBC should continue to receive funds and support via the Licence Fee. They said:

"It's positive, it acts as an unofficial tax, and I think it's good that it's publicly funded. It doesn't have to control what it broadcasts, as it might upset the shareholders. It would be a threat to the democracy to remove it."

"Even if you don't use it, it's still important. Analogy used 'Just because you haven't called the Police this year does not mean that they should go'."

"Not sure why there needs to be a change to the format of the licence fee, changing it could price people out and moving to a subscription fee could remove an unbiased news source from people's homes".

"On one hand, the licence fee enables the BBC to maintain a distance from advertising and government motives and agendas, informing and entertaining the public with high-quality journalism and content. However, it is an expensive fee to pay for those who do not actually use it".

"I think as long as the BBC are doing what they promise - Educate, Entertain and Inform - then the theory of the licence fee works. Perhaps the way in which they make sure they do this can be improved, perhaps with more input on what the public want to see. I think in the current climate it could do with a rethink, to make sure people can actually afford to pay it - the point is to make media accessible to everyone, so they need to make sure they're doing that".

With thanks to all the YAC members and wider Into Film team for their time and input. If you want to learn more about Into Film, please visit www.intofilm.org

REFLECTIONS: PAST AND PRESENT

By Toni Charlton

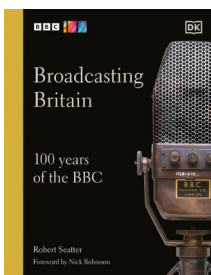


Tucked inside a folder, marked "J's Coronation Script", is an old newspaper clipping. The folder had belonged to John Vernon, who vision-mixed the BBC's television coverage of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II at Westminster Abbey, for Peter Dimmock.

And there's a reason why John marked a particular paragraph in the report, "*The best pictures of the day were perhaps two glimpses of the Duke of Cornwall. He stood awed and silent, in white blouse and bow, by the knees of the Queen Mother, gazing raptly, adoringly at his newly crowned mother.*" Headlined, 'GREATEST DAY OF BRITISH TV – PICTURES THAT WILL LIVE IN MEMORY', it was a story that neither man revealed until years later. In Peter's words, explaining how the BBC had managed to get that historic shot of the young Prince Charles watching his mother being crowned: "I took a risk. It was a deliberate risk, but I knew (and so did Johnny Vernon, who was vision mixing for me) that no one was going to complain! At the rehearsal I'd only used a two-inch lens on that camera, but nobody said, 'You won't change lenses, will you?'. Toni Charlton is a VLV trustee.

'Broadcasting Britain: 100 Years of The BBC'

Review by Anthony Wills



Published to coincide with the BBC's 100th birthday last October, this book was compiled and written by the Corporation's current Head of History, Robert Seatter. It's presented in a gazetteer-style format, with bite-size entries that aim to give readers a flavour of the key moments that, over ten tumultuous decades, defined a national institution. So, does it succeed?

The reviews have been mixed; some have called it shallow and lacking in insight, and certainly other writers have adopted a more analytical approach to the subject.

But Seatter didn't set out to write an academic treatise. His book is divided into decades – the 1920s are headed *Radio Magic*, the 30s *Inventing Television*, the 40s *Radio Wars* and so on. In my experience life doesn't work out quite as neatly as that! Some years get two pages, others four. Just for fun I checked my year of birth (I'll leave it to you to work that out) and most of the author's attention is devoted to TV newsreaders appearing in vision for the first time, including Nan Winton, who sadly didn't last long after viewers gave her the thumbs down.

Programme-wise he lists *Dixon Of Dock Green*, *This Is Your Life* and *Crackerjack*, with passing mentions of *The Grove Family* and *The Benny Hill Show*. The launch of ITV, arguably the most significant event of the year, merits only a couple of sentences, despite the BBC stealing its thunder by killing off Grace Archer on the opening night!

On the plus side, the book has an excellent index where you can look up your favourite programmes or stars, and superb images including some from the BBC's Archive that have never been seen in public before.

Broadcasting Britain: 100 Years of The BBC, by Robert Seatter, is published by Dorling Kindersley, ISBN 978-0241567548, 296 pages black & white and colour, rrp £25

Anthony Wills is a VLV Trustee and former BBC Radio Producer

SCREEN ENCOUNTERS WITH BRITAIN: WHAT DO YOUNG DANES MAKE OF BRITISH TV CONTENT?



Professor Jeanette Steemers, long-time VLV Trustee, along with colleagues at Kings College London are running an interesting AHRC-funded project looking at the TV and streaming preferences of young

Europeans, **Screen Encounters with Britain**.

It explores how British screen content is accessed, viewed, and interpreted overseas, probing the implications for British 'soft power' in an evolving post-Brexit context. Denmark is the first case study, released this month. Scheduled TV has become almost insignificant for this age group - with Netflix being the No.1 streaming service, followed by HBO Max and Disney+. US film and TV are by far the most consumed, followed by Danish and British productions.

It appears that young Danes pay little attention to content from other Scandinavian countries. English has become their 'natural second language' and Anglo-Saxon culture has become the natural extension of their cultural realm. British panel shows (*8 out of 10 Cats Does Countdown*, *QI*, or *Would I Lie To You*) and stand-up comedians (*Lee Mack*, *David Mitchell*, *Greg Davies*, *Jimmy Carr*, *Katherine Ryan*) are widely known and consumed on YouTube, as are star presenters like Jeremy Clarkson and celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay, who are particularly popular with young men. 423 survey respondents were able to name 164 British programmes, which confirms the high status of British screen content in Denmark. The most important reason for choosing British content is humour - no matter how dark or sad - followed by the English language.

The three remaining case study markets - Germany, the Netherlands, and Italy - will reveal whether this strong orientation towards Anglo-American productions is shared by young people in other parts of Europe. In Denmark, at least, Brexit does not appear to have dented the taste for British film and TV. This free report can be downloaded here:

[Screen Encounters with Britain: What do young Europeans make of Britain and its digital screen culture \(Interim Report Denmark, February 2023\).](#)

VLV'S CHAIR INTERVIEWED ON BEEBWATCH



Roger Bolton recently interviewed VLV's Chairman, Colin Browne for his podcast, Beebwatch.

The interview came in response to Colin's recent comment, regarding the BBC's lack of consultation with licence fee payers. Colin had said, "Since it is mainly the BBC's competitors who respond to competition assessments, ironically it could be said that the BBC's competitors have more power to influence the BBC's ability to make changes, rather than those who fund it. This is clearly nonsensical."

You can listen to the full interview at:
[**www.podfollow.com/beebwatch/view**](http://www.podfollow.com/beebwatch/view)

VLV AUTUMN CONFERENCE 2022

VLV's annual Autumn Conference was held at The Geological Society, London, on 2nd November 2022.

Following months of political turmoil when decisions on the future of Public Service Broadcasting had been put on hold, discussion focused on key issues that government and broadcasters needed to address for Britain's PSB system to be supported for the benefit of citizens.



The first session featured **Rhodri Talfan Davies**, the BBC's Director of Nations. This session was chaired by VLV patron **Helen Boaden**, former BBC Director of Radio and the first female Director of BBC News. Rhodri and Helen discussed many of the changes which are currently being implemented by the BBC following the announcement of its new strategy this summer.

The second session was a panel session, **What do citizens need from the Media Bill?** Former DCMS Minister **Damian Collins MP**, **Gareth Barr**, Director of Policy & Regulation at ITV, **Professor Steven Barnett** of the University of Westminster and **Helen Boaden** set out their views of what priorities should be for a future Media Act. They agreed that there is an urgent need to update legislation so that regulation is fit for the online streaming age, with prominence guaranteed for public service content. This session was chaired by **Tim Suter**, former Ofcom board member who oversaw the passage of the 2003 Communications Act while at the DCMS.

The third session was a lively panel discussion on **How to Fund the BBC**. **Mark Oliver**, Chairman of consultancy O&O, **Baroness Bonham Carter**, Liberal Democrat Spokesperson in the Lords, **Professor Catherine Johnson** of the University of Hull and **Roger Mosey**, former Head of BBC TV News, put forward their views on the best ways to fund the BBC. There was general agreement that any fee should ideally be progressive so that those who can afford to pay more do so, but the panellists were split between those against subscription and those who were for partial subscription for the BBC after 2028. This session was chaired by **Mark Damazer**, former Controller of BBC Radio 4 and Radio 7.

The final session featured broadcaster, **Roger Bolton**, in conversation with **Richard Ayre**, Chair of IMPRESS and former Member of the Ofcom Content Board.

Roger reflected on his long career in radio and TV. He now presents his own podcast on the BBC, called *Beebwatch*. See Column 1 for details.

VLV 2022 AGM

For the first time since 2019 the VLV AGM was held in person, at the Geological Society, Piccadilly, on 22 November 2022. 26 members attended, most in-person, and some remotely, in a new, hybrid style of meeting.

The VLV Annual Report and Accounts for year ending 31 May 2022 were reviewed and approved. Colin Browne, Mary Dixon and Peter Gordon were re-appointed for a further year as Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer. Andrew Board was elected as a Trustee and Professor Sarita Malik re-elected for a second three-year term. Professors Jeanette Steemers and Bob Usherwood stood down after serving two three-year terms.

After the formal business, the meeting discussed the work of the VLV and current media issues.

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 2022.

The ceremony will be held at the Geological Society's rooms at Burlington House, London, on Wednesday, 29th November 2023; we hope you will join us at this celebration.

The VLV Awards are an opportunity to celebrate the wealth of excellent programmes broadcast during 2022, 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 2022.

You have until Monday 17th April 2023 to return your completed ballot papers, either by post: The Old Rectory Business Centre, Springhead Road, Northfleet, Kent, DA11 8HN, or email: info@vlv.org.uk

Diary Dates

VLV's 40th Spring Conference

**Thursday 11th May 2023
10.00am-16.00pm
Geological Society/Online**

**VLV Awards and
40th Autumn Conference
Wednesday 29th November
2023**

We will announce the dates of other events during the coming months.

Please watch out for our email updates and visit the VLV website www.vlv.org.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.org.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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