

Lisa Nandy MP  
Secretary of State  
Department for Culture, Media and Sport  
100 Parliament Street  
London, SW1A 2BQ

Dear Secretary of State,

The BBC has been a cornerstone of British society for over a century. The BBC Charter Review, which will decide the BBC's purposes and how it is run for at least the next decade, is therefore an historic opportunity to ensure the BBC truly serves the British public and our democracy.

**Yet for too long, the public has been shut out from decisions about our vital public media institutions.** During the previous Charter Review in 2015-16 the government openly ignored tens of thousands of public contributions to its consultation, and cherry-picked responses to suit its own political aims.

**The BBC Charter review you have just launched must not repeat these undemocratic practices.** Tokenistic consultations, tickbox surveys and opaque industry lobbying will not deliver the legitimacy and new ideas that the BBC needs. The Government must ensure that this time, the Charter Review process is conducted in a way that delivers, and is seen to deliver, a just and democratic outcome for everyone.

This is only possible if the BBC Charter Review meaningfully involves and is directly shaped by the British public. We all deserve to be equal and active partners with the BBC, the Government and the creative industries in these once-in-a-generation debates about the BBC's future.

**We therefore call on the Government to immediately organise a series of Citizens' Assemblies, hosted throughout the UK with participants selected by democratic lottery, which will put the British public at the heart of deciding the future of the BBC.**

These Assemblies would give the public real power to debate and decide on the most important questions about the BBC's future, including the scale of its services, how the BBC is governed, and how it is funded.

Numerous [Citizens' Assemblies](#) have been held across the UK and around the world, and have given members of the public a direct and meaningful role in deciding major matters of public interest. Time and again these Assemblies have proven that when people from all walks of life are given the time, space and opportunity to deliberate together and weigh up the facts, they bring a breadth of wisdom and experience to find sensible, fair solutions that people can trust.

By organising Citizens' Assemblies the Government would guarantee that the BBC Charter Review will be:

**inclusive** of all the diverse communities in the UK and the creative workers that engage with the BBC;

**wide-ranging** and open to new ideas from grassroots sources, rather than seeking to pre-determine reforms;

**transparent and accountable** in how ideas and arguments inform decision-making;

**evidence-led**, with participants supported by both qualitative and quantitative evidence; and  
**consequential**, so that the public knows that their participation has affected the outcome.

The BBC itself could ensure everyone has an opportunity to engage in these vital debates, making these Citizens' Assemblies accessible to all UK audiences by broadcasting their discussions via BBC channels and the iPlayer platform.

The need to involve the public in decisions about the BBC's future is urgent. Real-terms cuts to the licence fee, imposed by previous governments, have seen the BBC's public funding shrink by 38% since 2010, even as changing audience needs have demanded greater investment to sustain the core BBC services that the public expects.

The BBC also faces fundamental challenges and threats from the digital media landscape. The BBC's status as a national public service broadcaster, and its right to public funding via the licence fee, must contend with the continued rise of global streaming services and digital platforms.

High-profile failures in BBC governance and decision-making have damaged its credibility, prompting knee-jerk reactions from the press and politicians. The BBC's reporting on global events and major matters of UK debate are testing its credibility and reputation as an impartial news source unlike ever before. In all of this, there remains no democratic means of public accountability for the BBC's actions, even though this is essential to restore and sustain the BBC's legitimacy.

Still, public trust in the BBC remains high. Ofcom's recent review of public service media demonstrates the need for universal public service media that informs, educates and entertains the British public *as citizens*, rather than merely as consumers.

The BBC supports education and media literacy, and offers comprehensive radio and TV across the UK's communities, regions and nations – all creating a uniquely valuable public service that no commercial provider or global streaming platform could ever provide.

The BBC World Service, World News and its online services are a major force for British soft power all over the world, and the BBC continues to invest in innovative technological advances that support a robust and sustainable public service in an ever-changing media landscape.

**If the BBC's next Royal Charter does not command widespread public support, it risks losing the democratic legitimacy it needs to continue as a vital and valued public institution.** At worst, the scale of challenges facing a poorly reformed BBC may prove impossible to overcome.

The stakes could not be higher. The Government must involve the public in these crucial debates on the BBC's future, and utilise Citizens' Assemblies to make the BBC Charter Review a genuinely open, inclusive and public-led process.

Yours sincerely,

*Signatories listed below*



Media Reform Coalition – Sortition Foundation – Voice of the Listener and Viewer – The Sandford St Martin Trust – Public Interest News Foundation – International Broadcasting Trust – Involve – Independent Media Association – Campaign for the Arts – The Children’s Media Foundation – UK Coalition for Cultural Diversity – Institute of Welsh Affairs – Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity – Doc Society – Media, Communications and Cultural Studies Association – Unlock Democracy – Assemble – Citizen Network – New Citizen Project – Shared Future CIC

#### Together with:

Professor Catherine Johnson, Professor of Media and Communication, University of Leeds – Professor Bart Cammaerts, Professor of Politics and Communication, London School of Economics – Professor Julie Firmstone, Professor of Journalism and Political Communication, University of Leeds – Emeritus Professor Rupert Read, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, University of East Anglia and Climate Majority Project – Professor Lilie Chouliaraki, Professor of Media and Communication, London School of Economics – Professor Anamik Saha, Professor of Race and Media, University of Leeds – Professor Katy Parry, Professor of Media and Politics, University of Leeds – Emeritus Professor John Corner FRSA, University of Liverpool – Professor Myria Georgiou, Professor of Media and Communications, London School of Economics – Dr Giles Moss, University of Leeds – Victoria Harwood Kapadia, director and writer – Titus Alexander FRSA, Democracy Matters – Banseka Kayembe, director and founder, Naked Politics – Dr Damian Tambini, Distinguished Policy Fellow, London School of Economics – Dr Cynthia Carter, Cardiff University – Professor Jonathan Hardy, Professor of Communications and Media, University of the Arts London – Dr Lone Sorensen, University of Leeds – Marcus Lyon, artist and publisher – Jay Griffiths, author – Roger Bolton, former BBC executive and presenter – Dr Nancy Thumim, University of Leeds – Dan Hind, publisher and writer – Dr Rachel O’Neill, London School of Economics – Tom de Grunwald, Forward Democracy – Katy Rubin, The People Act – Dr Phil Ramsey, Ulster University – Dr Sarah Lahm, University of Leeds – Dr Craig Gent, London School of Economics – Dr Paquita Zulueta, Imperial College London – Professor Dan Jackson, Professor of Media and Communication, Bournemouth University – Dr Michael Klontzas, Goldsmiths, University of London – Professor Chris Paterson, Professor of Global Communication, University of Leeds – Dr Philipp Seufferling, University of Glasgow – Evan Parker, University of Warwick – Federico Gaggio, brand strategist