

# BBC Charter Review

# The Alternative Green Paper

An open collection of transformative proposals for creating a more democratic, independent, accountable and sustainable BBC.

April 2026

Compiled and edited by  
 **MEDIA REFORM**  
COALITION



**The current review of the BBC’s Royal Charter is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to debate and decide the future of the BBC.**

Yet the Government’s ‘Green Paper’, published in December 2025, offers only a narrow range of proposals for how the BBC might be changed under its next Royal Charter.

The public consultation on BBC Charter Review has been rushed and is limited in its range of questions. This process risks shutting the British public out of contributing their ideas on how to reform the BBC.

**The Alternative Green Paper is a collaborative project to put the public at the centre of BBC Charter review.**

It is a public collection of ideas for reforming the BBC, featuring contributions from media experts, audience groups, campaign organisations and individual members of the public.

These proposals explore all aspects of the BBC, including how it should be funded, governed and regulated, what kinds of services it should provide, and how it can better represent and connect with its audiences.

The aim of the Alternative Green Paper is to ensure that these crucial debates on the future of the BBC go beyond the limited options presented in the Government’s Green Paper. Each contribution includes open questions for the public to give their views and comments, to encourage further debate and discussion.

**The Alternative Green Paper will remain open to new contributions throughout the BBC Charter Review process.**

If you would like to submit a proposal to be included in the Alternative Green Paper, please [read the submission guidelines](#) or contact the Media Reform Coalition at [mediareformcoalitionuk@gmail.com](mailto:mediareformcoalitionuk@gmail.com) with any questions.

The Alternative Green Paper

# Contents

Foreword – Prof. Lee Edwards, Media Reform Coalition .....	5
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## The BBC's constitution, governance and public accountability

The BBC as a Public Service Co-operative – Dan Hind and Tom Mills.....	7
A Public Media Commission: Renewing trust in the BBC – Voice of the Listener and Viewer .....	9
Creating a deputy Director-General and an Editor-in-Chief – CPBF North .....	11
A citizens' BBC: From state broadcaster to Civic Commons – Hard Art Collective.....	13
The Public Lock: Protecting the BBC from political capture – Demos.....	15
Opening up the debate: The future of the BBC and public service media – CPBF North .....	18

## The BBC's mission, purposes and regulation

The future role of Ofcom in regulating the BBC – CPBF North .....	21
Reviving 'the public' in the BBC's Public Purposes – Media Reform Coalition .....	23
The Village Common: A British digital commons platform – Independent Media Association .....	25
A new media literacy Public Purpose for the BBC – Lee Edwards.....	27
'Windows onto the World' for audiences – International Broadcasting Trust .....	29
The world's first fully sustainability-integrated public broadcaster – Jack Shelbourn .....	31
Decolonizing the BBC – Kurdish Media Watchdog Organization .....	33

## Funding the BBC and public media

The British Cultural Pass: A sovereign wealth fund for British culture – Andrew Smith .....	36
The Media Freedom Fund: Sustain public interest media – Independent Media Association.....	38
The Public Media Levy: A modern, fair and progressive funding model – Tom Chivers.....	40

An advertiser-free future for BBC content and services – CPBF North.....	42
The Democracy Dividend – Andrew Lindsay .....	44

**Production, commissioning and the creative workforce**

Empowering the creative workforce in every nation and region of the UK – Equity .....	47
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**Representation, diversity and communities**

Devolution / federalisation of the BBC – David Hutchinson .....	50
The future of local news and the BBC – Public Interest News Foundation .....	52
Reframing the BBC as a public service media infrastructure institution – David Lee .....	54
Diversity of thought and representation at the BBC – The Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity.....	56
Improving diverse representation on popular television broadcasts – Karen Wood and Kathryn Stamp .....	58
Centering neurodivergent voices in BBC programming – Marco Scalvini .....	60
The BBC as guarantor of cultural diversity and citizens’ cultural rights – UK Coalition for Cultural Diversity .....	62



# Foreword

## Prof. Lee Edwards, Chair of the Media Reform Coalition

The BBC is our largest and most influential public service broadcaster. Its activities affect the UK's media ecosystem and its media industries, the country's international reputation and perhaps most importantly, the quality of our individual and collective lives. Reviews of the BBC Royal Charter – its constitutional basis – hold major significance not only for the BBC itself, but for all of us.

The Media Reform Coalition sees this Charter Review process first and foremost as an exercise in democratic engagement, not simply an information-seeking exercise. The public fund the BBC, and the BBC is supposed to serve the public. It is time to take the public seriously in decisions about the BBC's future and, in theory, Charter Review offers the Government a rare opportunity to do exactly that.


Yet, the Government's Green Paper – its main effort at public consultation about Charter Review – is manifestly not designed for public consumption. It is dense, jargonistic, text-heavy and, at over 70 pages, makes excessive demands on any member of the public's time and energy to engage with it. The survey questions that accompany it do not always make sense, or even relate to the content of the Green Paper.

The **Alternative Green Paper** is a direct response to this hollow exercise in public consultation. We bring together proposals that are succinctly expressed and offer clear, open questions for public response. The proposals address a wide range of issues, but all are united by a concern with preserving the BBC as a strong public service broadcaster, with the public interest at its heart, and leading industry standards both on and off screen. Almost without exception, they argue the BBC should be more democratically governed, through and by public participation that has genuine influence.


The diversity of ideas about the BBC's future that circulate across the media reform movement and civil society more broadly, approach choices about the BBC's future as a matter of public interest, but also public empowerment. The BBC is, indeed, 'our' BBC, and the Alternative Green Paper proposals demonstrate how we, the public, can inspire and innovate new directions for a robust and sustainable future for the Corporation, grounded in a relationship with the public as genuine partners.

We would like to thank all contributors to the **Alternative Green Paper** for their commitment to this project, and extend an invitation to all readers to contribute their own proposals and thoughts on the future of the BBC.

We are also grateful to Clive Lewis MP for his ongoing support for this project and for championing the public interest in media reform.



# The BBC's constitution, governance and public accountability



# The BBC as a Public Service Co-operative

Dan Hind and Tom Mills / Common Wealth

*The BBC should belong to all of us by right. With the BBC transformed into a Public Service Co-operative, we will all become BBC members — with the right to take our place as active and direct participants in its mission to inform, educate, entertain and connect.*

*All members will have two new powers, which together secure public representation and participation:*

- 1. Every BBC member will be equally eligible to serve on members' panels recruited by random selection, which will oversee and shape the BBC's activities in partnership with BBC staff.*
- 2. Every BBC member will have the right to allocate a share of the BBC's budget to support independent public purpose content.*

## Background

The BBC is struggling to stake its place and purpose in a global digital landscape dominated by streaming services with enormous content catalogues and social media companies pumping out dangerous disinformation. Public media can, and should, provide a forum for democratic public deliberation: a space in which we are informed and empowered as citizens, and collectively decide the kind of society we want to live in.

Co-operative organisations are run for the benefit of their members, and the members are actively and directly involved in its operations. In our current relationship with the BBC, the public are audiences, licence fee payers and occasionally complainers - but we are not participants in any of the decisions about how the BBC is governed, what the BBC chooses to make, or how it serves the public interest. We recommend reconstituting the BBC as a public service co-operative.

A co-operative BBC would continue to be an independent public media institution. Like the current BBC, a co-operative BBC would have a mission to provide programmes and media services that benefit the public interest, and are freely available to all. But unlike the current BBC, a co-operative BBC would be directly accountable to the audiences it serves, and protected against interference from politicians and government.

Under a new constitution enshrined in the BBC's Royal Charter, the public would be empowered as active and direct participants in how the BBC works. Everybody in the UK would become a member of the BBC through their shared ownership and collective public funding of the BBC. Every member would have defined equal rights and powers to collectively make major decisions about the BBC's governance, its strategy and its services.

These powers will create a direct relationship between the public and our national broadcaster. They will enable us all to hold the BBC's management to account, and to be involved in setting the BBC's strategy. A co-operative BBC will be independent and democratic, accountable to the public and protected from government interference. It will enable us to guard against attempts to mislead and divide, and will give all of us a share of voice in the national conversation.

## How it would work

**Democratic governance and public accountability** – The members of the BBC are sovereign. They would be represented by a Members' Council, randomly selected from the membership, which would organise members' participation in the BBC's activities and directly hold the BBC executive to account.

**Deliberative and participatory mini-assemblies** – Members would play an active and direct role in assessing and improving the BBC’s operations and output. Panels appointed by lot would engage in a sustained and informed dialogue with the BBC’s staff and with the wider membership.

**The BBC’s strategy set by and for the public** – Members and BBC staff would shape the BBC’s Public Purposes and its overall strategy. The Royal Charter would be protected in law from political interference and any changes would require the informed consent of BBC members.

**Member-led commissioning** – Individual BBC members would have the right to allocate part of the BBC’s budget to fund independent public purpose media content in news, educational initiatives and cultural projects.

**A partner and incubator for local media** – A co-operative BBC would be embedded in local communities, so members can participate in media in their local areas. The BBC would provide community access to its local resources and actively partner with libraries, schools, hospitals and other civic institutions.

**An anchor institution for the UK’s creative industries** – A co-operative and locally embedded BBC would act as a publicly-owned hub supporting the UK’s world-leading creative industries, driving economic growth, technological innovation and cultural excellence in the arts, music and film around the country.

BBC members – all of us – would have power over core parts of the BBC’s governance and strategy. The Royal Charter would be amended to redefine the BBC as a co-operative organisation, and would lay out rights and roles for members in BBC operations:

- A Members’ Council would hold management accountable for delivering the BBC’s mission, and ensure members’ interests are reflected throughout the BBC. The Council would be made up of 120 members, selected by lot to be representative of the UK population, with most serving for a one-year term.
- Members’ Panels would assess and help shape specific areas of the BBC’s operations. Some panels would be permanent features of governance of the BBC, such as a News and Current Affairs Panel and Local Members’ Panels. The membership will also be able establish temporary panels to address particular concerns.
- A Secretariat would operate as the administrative arm of the Members’ Council, with a formal mandate to ensure the active and direct participation of the membership across the activities of the BBC. The Secretariat would provide the Council and the Panels with the support and resources necessary to inform and empower members’ control over how the BBC works.
- Formal representation for the BBC’s staff will be crucial to the success of the move to a co-operative model. A mixture of election and random selection will be used to ensure that the interests of non-managerial staff are protected, and to free up the organisation’s latent knowledge. BBC staff will have representation on the BBC’s board.

## Your views

- How much of the BBC’s budget should be allocated directly by members?
- How many Members’ Panels should be established? Which aspects of the BBC’s operations and governance should they oversee?
- What powers should the Members’ Council have?
- How should the BBC’s staff be integrated as full partners in the new organisation?

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Full proposals available from the Common Wealth website:

<https://www.common-wealth.org/publications/our-mutual-friend-the-bbc-in-the-digital-age>



# A Public Media Commission: Renewing trust in our most important public service broadcaster

## Voice of the Listener and Viewer

*A Public Media Commission (PMC) should be created as an independent body to oversee and make decisions about the BBC's governance, funding, and accountability. A PMC would protect the BBC's political and economic independence, provide a new foundation for public trust, and is therefore central to securing the future of the BBC.*

### Background

The BBC plays a unique role in national life because it has four fundamental features whose combination is not possessed by any other media institution: public ownership, a public remit, public funding and universal accessibility free at the point of use.

These four features must be safeguarded, and the BBC's importance to national life recognised, in the forthcoming charter renewal and funding settlements. The safeguarding of these four features must be accompanied by strengthened mechanisms of direct public accountability, ensuring that audiences are not only beneficiaries of the BBC's services but active participants in shaping its future.

### Rationale

The BBC's ability to fulfil its unique role at the heart of the UK's national life is compromised by three interrelated challenges: political interference, declining and unstable funding and weaknesses in its current remit and regulatory framework.

Without reform, these pressures risk pushing the BBC into a cycle of declining trust, engagement and relevance. These challenges are exacerbated by the absence of sufficiently strong and visible mechanisms through which the public can hold the BBC, Ofcom and government to account.

### How it would work

Central to any reform would be the creation of a Public Media Commission (PMC). The PMC would:

- Determine and recommend the level of public funding for the BBC, including the level of any replacement for the licence fee
- Publish funding recommendations to ensure transparency and public accountability
- Review and assess the BBC's fulfilment of its mission and public purposes as well as using these assessments of BBC performance to inform funding recommendations and decisions.
- Apply the public interest test not only to the launch of new BBC services but also to the closure of existing services.
- Operate independently of government, with non-executive appointments to the BBC Board made through an independent Media Appointments Panel.
- Oversee an independent and transparent process to nominate to government the appointment of the BBC Chair.

The aim would be that the PMC would be a relatively small, agile organisation with the ability to make relatively quick decisions.

## Benefits

In July 2015, the last Charter Review, George Osborne, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, forced a major funding cut on the BBC by forcing the corporation to take on the cost of free television licences for over-75s. The agreement was reached during a week of secret negotiations and was announced by the Culture Secretary in the House of Commons after the deal was already effectively decided by the Treasury. The main benefits of an independent body monitoring and recommending the funding level for the BBC are that negotiations cannot be conducted behind closed doors and are accountable to the public who, after all, are the people who pay for the BBC via the licence fee.

## Your views

- Do you agree or disagree that establishing a Public Media Commission would improve democratic legitimacy by giving citizens a clearer voice in how the BBC is funded and governed?
- To what extent would you support the creation of an independent Public Media Commission to determine the level of the BBC licence fee, rather than decisions being made primarily by government?
- Do you think an independent Public Media Commission could strengthen public trust in the BBC by making funding decisions more transparent, fair, and accountable to citizens rather than politicians?
- How should the public be involved in the work of a Public Media Commission when it considers changes to the licence fee?

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# Governance and management: Creating a deputy Director-General and an Editor-in-Chief

## CPBF North

*The BBC needs a deputy Director General, as used to be the case, and a separate Editor-in-Chief. This is the tried and tested model for all commercial media: a company boss and an editor.*

*There should be no government appointment of BBC directors. The chair should be elected by the board. The representatives of the nations or regions should be selected in the areas concerned by giving extra power to the Audience Councils.*

*There should be representation for BBC staff among the non-executive directors, chosen by the unions, and a representative of BBC journalists on the Editorial Standards Committee of the board, elected by the BBC journalists.*

## Background

As in the case of all media, the BBC has two wide but separate management functions: administrative and editorial. The first includes internal functions and relations with other stakeholders. The second includes artistic as well as editorial judgement. Both need to have separate and stronger safeguards.

As it happens, shortcomings in the BBC's management have been brutally exposed, as rarely before, by two years of running disputes over coverage of the war in Palestine. The BBC has been relentlessly attacked by all sides. It has always liked to claim that, if criticised by both sides, it must be doing the right thing, but that flippant response can no longer be sustained.

The BBC appears to lack the strength to stand up to the high-pressure lobbying it has received, and to the aggressive line of right-wing newspapers in particular. In the face of pro-Israel coverage, more than 600 Jewish people last year signed a public protest. But the criticisms are not just from external vested interests: they have been made internally as well. Members of staff under great pressure have been put on sick leave or resigned, and more are demoralised.

When senior, top-level presenters such as Emily Maitlis, Lewis Goodall and Jon Sopel are leaving for the commercial sector and complaining of bias, something is wrong. They alleged that they had been constrained in their commentary but why should respected and trusted commentators not be permitted to broadcast more freely? How independent is that?

Journalistic staff should be formally involved in the powerful Editorial Standards Committee, which has attracted so much criticism over the influence of political appointees, and most notably the non-executive director Sir Robbie Gibb.

Accounts of the distortion of reporting under pressure from board level have been publicly aired for two years, yet nothing appears to have been resolved. The DG and Head of News are forced to resign but the directors appear to be paralysed. The concerns of the staff, the most experienced and qualified workforce in the country, have been ignored. This crisis has revealed the weakness at the very top of the structure. The DG, the CEO, had to carry the can because there is no deputy and no chief editorial officer.

The board appeared to be divided by the fact that five of their number are government-appointed, including the chair. The other four are supposedly representatives of the UK nations. The BBC has quite an extensive apparatus

for consulting regional opinion about its output, with its Audience Councils in the nations and regional panels informing them, yet their representatives at board level are chosen in Downing Street.

The Middle East conflict may be a highly contentious and exceptional case, but it reveals the cracks that need filling. Hard cases are the ones that matter.

### How it would work

- The BBC would have a deputy Director General, as used to be the case, and a separate Editor-in-Chief.
- There would be no government appointment of BBC directors. The chair would be elected by the board. The representatives of the nations or regions would be selected in the areas concerned by giving extra power to (reintroduced) Audience Councils.
- There would be representation for BBC staff among the non-executive directors, chosen by the unions, and a representative of BBC journalists on the Editorial Standards Committee of the board, elected by the BBC journalists.

These proposals could be implemented by careful consideration, by Parliament, of the terms of the Royal Charter and the Licence and Agreement, as part of the wider process of Charter Review, drawing on the wealth of proposals that are now in the public domain for reforms of this sort.

### Benefits

A better form of governance would help rebuild public trust in the BBC, strengthen its editorial independence and support the work of journalists within the organisation. Failing to take robust measures of this sort will lead to a further erosion of public trust in an organisation that will continue to be wracked by internal and external criticisms of its editorial and political independence.

### Your views

- Do you support the creation of a BBC deputy Director-General and an Editor-in-Chief as senior executive roles?
- Do you consider that the governance and management of the BBC need reform?
- If so, what measures do you think should be taken to strengthen the BBC's political and editorial independence?
- What other measures should be taken to strengthen public trust in the BBC?

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# A citizens' BBC: From state broadcaster to Civic Commons

## Members of the Hard Art Collective

*The BBC belongs to all of us, we must all be empowered as co-owners of a public service to deliver a vibrant, relevant and innovative model of public service media that meets the needs of all citizens in the public and private spheres we all share.*

*We propose a fundamental shift from a state-governed model to a Public Service Mutual—a cooperative owned and directed by its licence fee payers and staff.*

### Background

Hard Art is a collective of nearly 400 artists, scientists, and thinkers—including Brian Eno, Es Devlin, and Jeremy Deller—standing in solidarity in the face of climate and democratic collapse.

We view the BBC not merely as a content producer, but as vital civic infrastructure. It is the "infrastructure of connection" that underpins our shared reality, yet currently, the system where the Royal Charter is renewed every decade, creates a "Sword of Damocles" effect. It holds the BBC's survival hostage to electoral cycles, allowing governments to use the threat of de-funding or abolition to exercise political pressure. In a time of crisis, we are contributing to this Charter Review because we believe the BBC must be skilfully transformed to secure our democratic future.

### Rationale

Our proposals are grounded in the following objections to both current BBC governance and the Charter Review process itself.

- The current system of appointments and funding makes the BBC vulnerable to short-term political leverage. We must divorce the BBC's existence from this vulnerability.
- We reject the Green Paper's flirtation with commercial models. The BBC is a public good, not a transactional product. Top-up subscriptions or paywalls for "premium" content would create a "two-tier" BBC—a gold service for the privileged and a degraded version for those who can't afford it. This destroys the principle of Universality, through which the BBC binds us together as a nation. Introducing ads would cannibalise the revenue of ITV and Channel 4 while distorting BBC commissioning toward "safe," commercially viable content reducing opportunities for creative risks.
- We reject the Green Paper's proposal of making "driving economic growth" a statutory purpose. This may shift the BBC's focus to serving commercial interests rather than citizens.
- Adding "accuracy" as a purpose is redundant (it is already in the guidelines) and opens the door to political interference under the guise of "verifying facts."
- The Green Paper accepts the dominance of Big Tech. We do not. The BBC should not be a tenant on hostile commercial platforms that optimise for profit and drive polarisation.
- The current Charter renewal process is based on a 'tick box' consultation, which is insufficient for securing the future of our media.

### How it would work

We propose the following measures to secure the future of the BBC as a public good and realise a vision for the future that establishes the public as co-owners, not consumers.

## Governance: Ending the existential crisis

- Introduce a **Forever Charter** - We must divorce the BBC's existence from short-term political leverage. We propose placing the BBC on a permanent statutory footing. Operational performance should be scrutinised, but the institution's right to exist should never again be up for negotiation.
- Introduce standing **Citizens' Assemblies**, selected by democratic lottery (sortition) like a jury. These bodies would have the statutory power to set strategic direction, ensuring the BBC answers to the public, not the government.
- **Secure Independent Appointments:** The Board should be elected by the citizen-owners, creating a firewall against political coercion.

## Funding: Universal and independent

- **Establish an Independent Funding Commission:** The Treasury should not set the licence fee. We propose an independent statutory body (like the German KEF) to conduct evidence-based assessments of the funding required to meet the BBC's mission. Its recommendations must be binding.

## Digital Sovereignty: Building the 'Public Square'

- **Invest in Public Digital Infrastructure:** The BBC must return to its role as a technological innovator (as it has been through its history, not least with iPlayer). It should pioneer and build open, interoperable platforms, including social media, that prioritise privacy and public value over extraction.
- **Develop Public AI:** Artificial Intelligence should be governed as a public resource. We call for the BBC to lead the development of Public AI and sovereign data trusts, ensuring these powerful tools serve the common good rather than commercial surveillance.

## Public Purposes: Citizens over Commerce

- Introduce a new Public Purpose for the **BBC to act as an Anchor Institution**, mandated to share resources and technology with independent local media across, and beyond, the UK.
- Introduce a new Public Purpose for **the BBC to support and invest in Media Literacy and Public Empowerment** to help citizens navigate the information age.

## Benefits

We are at a crossroads. Rather than managing the BBC's decline, we shall revitalise it as a **Citizens' BBC**. By democratising its governance, securing its funding, and reclaiming our digital sovereignty, we can ensure the BBC remains the bedrock of our culture and the engine of our democracy for the next century and beyond.

## Your views

- Should all BBC content remain free at the point of use for everyone, or is it acceptable for some content to be behind a paywall? Why?
- What responsibility, if any, should the BBC have in shaping the UK's digital public space (for example, online platforms, social media, or AI)?
- How should the BBC be funded in the future?
- How should the BBC be held accountable – and to whom?

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# The Public Lock: Protecting the BBC from political capture

## Demos

*The BBC needs to be protected from political capture. We propose introducing – through a new BBC Independence Act and a reformed perpetual Royal Charter – a “public lock”, requiring that any proposal to fundamentally alter foundational provisions of or abolish the BBC must pass through a dual safeguard of Citizens’ Assembly deliberation, followed by supermajority votes in all four UK legislatures. Primary legislation (the BBC Independence Act) would create the public lock threshold, supported by amendments to the Royal Charter removing the fixed-term expiry cycle.*

## Background

The ten-yearly renewal cycle for the BBC’s Royal Charter has, for a century, allowed the BBC to be periodically assessed and evolve. This process is led by the government in office at the time the Charter expires. In theory, if a Charter were not renewed, the BBC would be dissolved, but while governments have used renewal to exert political pressure and extract concessions, in practice, dissolving the BBC has not been a serious threat.

But the political environment has changed, and this threat is no longer theoretical. Nigel Farage, leader of Reform UK, has openly called for ending the BBC’s universal funding mechanism. It is no longer inconceivable that a future Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport or Chancellor would (as technically they can) withhold some or all of the BBC’s funding, or that a government might simply allow the BBC’s Charter to expire - without informed public consent.

This vulnerability is now compounded by a rapidly deteriorating information environment. In the context of declining trust, the UK’s epistemic security - the resilience of its information supply chain - is undermined by tech oligarchy, global information warfare, the erosion of sustainable news ecosystems and regulatory shortcomings. Therefore, the BBC is not simply a broadcaster or news organisation: it is critical national infrastructure for democratic discourse, for shared knowledge, for social cohesion, free of capture, surveillance or data-harvesting - which is precisely why it is under attack. Its independence and existence is no longer just media policy - it is a matter of national sovereignty and security.

Whatever other reforms are made, we must protect the core existence of the BBC for the nation. An institution which belongs to the public should require the public’s informed consent before it can be fundamentally changed or abolished. The Public Lock ensures that existential decisions about the BBC cannot be taken by a government acting alone during a single parliamentary term.

## Rationale

**The 10-year renewal cycle is now a threat.** The 2015 process showed governments can use it to impose structural changes affecting independence - e.g. government-appointed Board members - with minimal parliamentary scrutiny or public deliberation.

**There is no formal public role in existential decisions.** Charter renewal is conducted bilaterally between the BBC and the Secretary of State, with no requirement for direct public voice over its future (except non-binding consultation at ministerial discretion).

**Parliament’s role is limited.** The Charter does not require a parliamentary vote, and the Framework Agreement is subject only to limited scrutiny. This means the constitutional basis of a major national institution can be rewritten with little democratic oversight.

**Evidence and precedent for higher thresholds:** Similar democracies apply enhanced protections to institutions deemed essential to democratic life, such as requiring supermajority votes or referenda before constitutional courts, central banks, and electoral commissions can be altered or abolished. Amendments to the 2013 Charter for the Press Recognition Panel require supermajorities in the four UK legislatures. The BBC,

as the UK's most significant institution for informed public discourse, merits equivalent protection. Citizens' assemblies in Ireland, France, Belgium, and the UK provide evidence for structured public deliberation on complex questions.

## How it would work

The Public Lock would operate as a two-stage safeguard, triggered only when a proposal meets the threshold of a "fundamental change" to the BBC, defined in statute, including: dissolution or abolition of the BBC, removal or weakening of independence protections or the principle of universality, and fundamental alterations to the BBC's public purposes.

### **Stage 1: Citizens' Assembly Selection and Deliberation**

- Approx. 150 members, selected through civic lottery (sortition) with stratification to reflect the UK population by age, gender, geography, ethnicity, disability, & socio-economic background.
- The Assembly would convene and deliberate over a minimum of four weekends, hearing evidence from the government, the BBC, Ofcom, civil society, industry, and the public.
- The Assembly would produce an Advisory Report setting out its findings and recommendations, published and laid before all four UK legislatures.
- A second Assembly, composed of entirely new members, would be required to deliberate on the same question no fewer than three years later, to ensure that its recommendations reflect sustained public judgement, not a response to short-term political circumstances.

### **Stage 2: Supermajority Parliamentary Approval**

- Once both Assemblies have reported the government may bring the proposed change before Parliament.
- Approval would require a two-thirds supermajority in the House of Commons, and from the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Senedd, and the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- This requirement reflects the BBC's UK-wide constitutional role, preventing a Westminster government from unilaterally dismantling an institution that serves all four nations.

## Benefits

### **Success would mean:**

- Long-term constitutional certainty for the BBC, enabling genuine strategic planning, sustained investment, and editorial and operational freedom from the political cycle.
- Governments retain the ability to propose change, but proposals to fundamentally alter the BBC would require public deliberation and cross-party, cross-national democratic scrutiny.
- Public trust in the BBC's independence could increase with the knowledge that **citizens are a key voice** in the institution's future, alongside ministers.
- The four-nations requirement would reinforce the BBC's role as a genuinely **shared UK institution** at a time when that shared institutional fabric is under strain.

### **Failure to act would mean:**

The BBC continues to face existential uncertainty and political leverage over funding, governance, scope, or editorial coverage. In an information environment shaped by global platforms with no public interest obligations, the weakening or politicisation of the BBC accelerates, depriving the UK of its primary institution for trusted, universally accessible public knowledge, the engine of the creative economy, and a source of credibility and soft power.

### **Alternatives and counter-proposals:**

- *Statutory entrenchment without citizen involvement:* A BBC Independence Act could require supermajority votes, without a Citizens' Assembly, raising the threshold for change but failing to ground the BBC's legitimacy in direct public engagement.
- *Binding referendum:* referenda on complex institutional questions risk reducing nuanced trade-offs to binary choices, and are vulnerable to well-funded misinformation campaigns - exactly what the public lock seeks to guard against.

- *Extended Charter cycle*: Lengthening the Charter period would defer vulnerability, not eliminate it, and would not create any mechanism for public voice in existential decisions.

### Your views

- Should fundamental changes to the BBC's existence or independence require a higher threshold of democratic approval than currently required?
- A Citizens' Assembly uses a civic lottery to select a representative group of people to deliberate on a specific question. Is this an appropriate mechanism for fundamental decisions about the BBC's future?
- This proposal requires the consent of legislatures in all four UK nations before the BBC can be fundamentally changed. Is this proportionate, given the BBC's UK-wide role? How else could the BBC be accountable to all parts of the UK?
- Are there risks to making the BBC harder to change? How can institutional protection be balanced against the need for the BBC to adapt and remain responsive to the public?

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# Opening up the debate: The future of the BBC and public service media

## CPBF North

*The consultation on the Green Paper launched in December 2025, runs for just twelve weeks. This is far too short a period. It does not allow time for members of the public and organisations across society with an interest in the issues to absorb, analyse and discuss the issues. This brief period favours those, mainly the large, powerful and rich media companies, who have the resources to produce detailed responses in a short time.*

*The government should extend the BBC's Charter, so that it expires one year later than planned, to 31 December 2028. It should establish a high profile, independent Committee of Enquiry into the Future of the BBC and Public Service Media, charged to report by June 2027. The Committee should be required to canvass the widest possible range of views on the issues.*

## Background

The pace of change in the communication industries has been, and will continue to be, extremely rapid. The explosion of commercial communications (streaming services, new channels, social media) has put pressure on existing public service providers, most notably the BBC. Since 2010 it has been forced to accept cuts in services and to fund key ones such as S4C and the World Service from a Licence Fee which has been drastically pared back.

The last major public inquiry into broadcasting was in the 1980s. This was the Peacock Committee, which reported in 1986 and established the direction that communications policy would take in subsequent years. This was to support the spread of more and more market forms of communications at the expense, ultimately, of public service broadcasting. Since then Public Service Media have been on the defensive and their role in the media world diminished. Action must be taken to reverse this and to extend the role of Public Service Media across all platforms.

## Rationale

The DCMS drew up the proposals in the Green Paper by consulting 'stakeholders'. It has not publicised who these were nor what was advice they gave the Department. The process has not been transparent. If the government proceeds at the pace that it intends and publishes a White Paper later in 2026, that will rule out the possibility of the wider public having the time to engage in an informed way with the policy making process.

The time has come for a fresh look at the direction of communications policy; one that involves members of the public and their representative organisations, such as trade unions, local authorities, sporting organisations, minority rights groups and many more in discussing and creating policy. The proposal for a Committee of Enquiry into the Future of the BBC and Public Service Media, offers the chance to do just that.

The DCMS has set out a series of questions which can be answered online. These are often closed questions which means that there are only limited options on the table. In addition, the public is required to answer what amounts to a series of multiple choice questions, with very little space for considered responses. The process does not allow opportunities for wider discussion among the public and seeks to channel responses within a framework which appears to rule out key options, such as funding the BBC and public service media through direct taxation. It also assumes that the BBC can be treated as if it was not influenced radically by the wider communications environment. The whole process appears to be designed as a token consultation, with the real decisions being taken behind the scenes by industry lobbyists, civil servants and politicians. This proposal seeks to change that, or, at least, to modify it significantly.

## How it would work

The government would extend the BBC's Charter for one year, to allow for wider consultation. It would then appoint a Committee of Enquiry into the Future of the BBC and Public Service Media. The remit of the Committee would be to consider the range of issues associated with the maintenance and promotion of Public Service Media across all existing and emerging platforms, including the BBC, and to make recommendations accordingly.

The House of Commons Select Committee for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport would invite nominations for the Chair and members of the Committee, ensuring that there was a balance between representatives of the industry, the recognised trade unions, academics specialising in media policy and media economics, and organisations from civil society such as charities, educational groups and arts organisations, as well as local authorities and the devolved governments.

The Committee would work to a strict timetable, reporting at the latest by June 2027. It would be required to establish Citizens Assemblies in the nations and regions across the UK. It would commission independent research, organise public meetings and invite organisations and specialists to submit written and oral evidence. It would have power to demand evidence of who has been consulted to date on the process of creating the Green Paper and be required to hold all of its hearings in public, to publish all the evidence it receives and to publish minutes of its own meetings.

## Benefits

The main benefit of this is that it would move the centre of policy discussions away from the corporate interests and lobbyists and into the spotlight of public scrutiny. It would provide a longer period to develop public knowledge of and engagement with the future of communications. It would provide a focus on the need to see the BBC within the broader context of communications policy and on ways to promote Public Service Media in a rapidly changing media landscape. It would allow people in the nations and regions of the UK to organise responses to the Committee. The alternative is to allow the power to shape communications policy to remain in the hands of well-funded industry lobbyists, civil servants and politicians.

## Your views

- What is the best way to involve the public in deciding the future of the BBC and other Public Service Media such as Channel 4 or S4C?
- What issues should be at the heart of an extended period of public consultation?
- How might the whole process be made more open to scrutiny?

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# The BBC's mission, purposes and regulation

# The future role of Ofcom in regulating the BBC

## CPBF North

*Ofcom should have a more limited role in regulating the BBC. In particular, the responsibility for reviewing the BBC's fulfilment of its mission and public purposes should be passed to another body. Furthermore, the Ofcom board should no longer be appointed, even indirectly, by government. These measures will increase and safeguard the independence of the BBC.*

### Background

The DCMS Green Paper on BBC Charter renewal makes it abundantly clear that the government will engage with Ofcom as the BBC's independent regulator. Specifically it notes that existing external scrutiny by Ofcom "plays an important role in holding the BBC to account, and we will need to consider how any new provisions within the Charter should be regulated". Additionally it observes that "options aiming to enhance the BBC's accountability include strengthening the external scrutiny of the BBC; this could include, for example, greater oversight by Ofcom or Parliament".

In its 2022 document *How Ofcom Regulates the BBC*, Ofcom explained its role in relation to the BBC as follows:

"The BBC's Mission is to serve all audiences in the UK by providing duly impartial, high-quality and distinctive output and services which inform, educate and entertain. Ofcom became the first independent regulator of the BBC in 2017. We must hold the BBC to account for fulfilling its Mission and promoting the Public Purposes on behalf of audiences, protect fair and effective competition, and secure content standards in BBC programming."

The Green Paper states that the Charter Review "will consider ways to ensure the BBC is truly accountable to the public who pay for and use it". Crucial here, it argues, is the matter of trust, which depends on "transparent decision-making, responsible use of public funds, and organisational and cultural standards that maintain the confidence of its audiences".

In the specific case of the BBC, the Green Paper states that "people must be able to trust both not just what they see and hear, but trust in the BBC as an institution" and notes that public trust has fallen as a result of "recent instances of editorial failings and workplace misconduct of staff". It argues that "these serious failures should act as a catalyst for change in the BBC and they should not be allowed to happen again".

The Green Paper lays out a number of ways in which trust in the BBC can be enhanced and notes that 'in taking these policy priorities forward, we will also consider how the BBC is regulated by Ofcom'. These priorities are:

- Enhancing accountability of the BBC so that it can better reflect and represent the public.
- Improving engagement that leads to better perceptions of the BBC.
- Enhancing governance, oversight and transparency in a way that supports wider public trust in how decisions are taken and in the content and services the BBC delivers.
- Upholding the BBC's independence so that it can maintain trust in its programmes and content.
- Placing a renewed focus on the BBC's organisational standards and culture, to build public trust in the institution and its reputation, and drive up standards in the wider creative sector.

### Rationale

In the matter of trust, the Green Paper states that:

“Government is consulting on updating the BBC’s Mission and Public Purposes to give accuracy equal importance alongside impartiality when providing its news, content and services. We will consider whether further obligations on Ofcom and the BBC to report on accuracy could increase public confidence on the coverage of controversial topics.”

However, this raises the fundamental question of whether Ofcom *itself* can be trusted on these matters, particularly given its abysmal performance in allowing GB News repeatedly to run a coach and horses through its own *Broadcasting Code* in the case of both the accuracy and due impartiality regulations. Given that one of the spurious reasons which Ofcom has given for its laxity towards GB News is the need for a wider range of views on British television (*vide* its CEO Dame Melanie Dawes warning the DCMS select committee about ‘a single, monocultural, a mono-representation of views on British TV’), it is surely not too fanciful to imagine it insisting that, in the name of ‘balance’ and ‘diversity’, the BBC runs this kind of anti-journalism on its own channels (not least in the event of a Reform government). Which brings us back to the need for greater political independence in the case of both the BBC and Ofcom.

## How it would work

The Green Paper notes that:

“Major changes were made to the BBC’s accountability framework under the last Charter Review. Greater responsibility and powers were given to Ofcom as the BBC’s independent regulator. The complaints framework was also overhauled, with Ofcom assuming a key role in the complaints process about the BBC’s content.”

We propose that this process should be reversed and that Ofcom should have a more limited role in regulating the BBC. The responsibility for reviewing the BBC’s fulfilment of its mission and public purposes should be passed to another body, partly because Ofcom has long appeared to many to put its duty to promote the interests of people as consumers above the interests of people as citizens, and partly in order to ensure greater independence from government on the part of both the BBC and Ofcom itself.

This body could be either a new BBC Governance Board, appointed by a new and wholly independent appointments body (the British Broadcasting Challenge recommendation) or a Public Media Commission (the VLV recommendation). Ofcom would continue to oversee market impact assessments involving new services or significant changes to existing services. Appointments to the Ofcom board should no longer be in the hands of government; instead, this function should be taken over by a new, independent Media Appointments Panel, chosen by the Public Appointments Commissioner (as recommended by the Voice of the Listener and Viewer).


## Benefits

Greater political independence in the case of both the BBC and Ofcom; a greater degree of independence from Ofcom on the part of the BBC; more effective and reliable guardianship of the BBC’s mission and public purposes; better stewardship of the regulations concerning accuracy and impartiality.

## Your views

- What should be the relationship between the BBC and Ofcom?
- How should appointments to Ofcom’s board be made?

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# A local, international and technological public service: Reviving ‘the public’ in the BBC’s Public Purposes

## Media Reform Coalition

*The BBC needs to be re-established as a public institution and there is a clear case for reviving its vital role as a local, international and technological public service. New Public Purposes are needed that (a) establish the BBC as an ‘anchor institution’ for local media, civic groups and communities; (b) restore the requirement to “bring the world to the UK” so that audiences can access high-quality international content; and (c) re-emphasise the BBC’s role in R&D so that new technologies are deployed for public benefit.*

### Background

The Public Purposes of the BBC are the top-level requirements for the content, services and public benefits the BBC should provide. The Purposes are defined in the BBC’s Royal Charter, and their fulfilment is regulated by Ofcom. Assessment of the overall effectiveness of the Public Purposes forms a core aspect of Charter renewal and the ongoing review of how well the BBC has performed since 2017.

The DCMS Green Paper suggests several changes to the current Public Purposes, yet the Government has provided little rationale or justification for these. In particular:

- The Green Paper suggests updating the BBC’s existing Public Purpose for providing “impartial news and information” to include a specific requirement for accuracy. The BBC already has strong requirements for news accuracy as part of its editorial guidelines, the binding standards code for BBC news content which are regulated by Ofcom. The Green Paper does not make clear what would be gained or changed given accuracy is already embedded in BBC practice.
- The Green Paper also proposes requiring the BBC to “drive economic growth across the UK and support the creative economy”. The BBC already acts as a major investor in and catalyst for the UK’s creative industries, contributing £5bn annually to the UK economy. Creating a specific Public Purpose for ‘growth’ risks compelling the BBC to put economic concerns above its core mission to serve the needs and interests of audiences as citizens. This would also compromise the BBC’s independence, by entrenching a political priority of the Government into the BBC’s constitution and directing Ofcom to evaluate economic ‘success’ in contest with the BBC’s social and cultural benefits.
- A discussion on research and development suggests restoring “research, development and innovation” as part of this proposed Public Purpose for economic growth, but framed exclusively in terms of *industrial* benefits – for example by sharing technological innovations with the wider (predominantly commercial) media sector. The BBC’s 2007-2016 Royal Charter framed the BBC’s technological contributions as a *public* benefit, yet the Green Paper discussions serve only to reinforce the marketisation of public media.

BBC Charter review should re-establish the BBC as a *public* institution, yet the Green Paper shows no indication of restoring the BBC’s previous Public Purposes which were abolished by the BBC’s renewed 2017-27 Charter. There is a clear case for reviving the BBC’s vital role as a local, international and technological public service.

### Rationale

**Local media** – The UK’s local media faces an existential crisis, driven by corporate consolidation, concentrated ownership, and mass closures of local newspapers, radio stations and community media outlets across the UK. The Green Paper recognises this, but repeats the commercial sector’s claims that the BBC is ‘treading on the

toes of the market'. It proposes expanding the Local Democracy Reporter Scheme (LDRS), and requiring the BBC to “explore partnerships with high quality local media outlets”. This is a sound principle, but in practice is vulnerable to capture by dominant commercial players– as with the LDRS, which currently acts as little more than a subsidy for corporate news publishers.

The BBC’s role in local media must have the needs and interests of local communities at its heart – and not prioritise protecting existing commercial players or merely addressing ‘market gaps’. The BBC should play a leading role in reinvigorating local media. The BBC’s local role should also encourage and facilitate a more collaborative and participatory relationship with local communities, enabling members of the public to commission and create their own local content using the BBC as a genuinely public resource.

**International content** – The 2017-2027 Royal Charter removed reference in the Public Purposes to “bringing the UK to the world and *the world to the UK*”, implying that British audiences had nothing to benefit from content and experiences from outside the UK. This led to a significant reduction in the BBC’s investment in content from around the world, exacerbating the reduction in international investment across UK public service broadcasting.

**Research, Development and Innovation** – Research and Development has already been central to the BBC’s operations and success, and has been a driver of broadcast innovations, from FM radio, the introduction of television, the development of text services such as Ceefax, and more recently, digital innovations including BBC iPlayer, Freeview, and new imaging technologies. However, increased competitive pressure on the BBC risks research being driven by market imperatives. The new Charter should re-establish a Public Purpose that requires the BBC to prioritise the public interest in its Research and Development strategy.

## How it would work

The next BBC Royal Charter should feature three new Public Purposes, requiring the BBC:

- To serve as an ‘anchor institution’ for local communities as an independent, accountable and participatory media organisation, partnering with local media and civic institutions and making its resources available for public use to create and commission local media content.
- To ensure high-quality international content covering global affairs is made widely available and accessible to UK audiences.
- To prioritise research, development and innovation in new media technologies that serves the public interest and enhances the public’s access to and participation in the media landscape.

Ofcom’s regulation of the BBC’s Public Purposes should also be radically revised to require the regulator to explore and evaluate the *social and cultural* impact of what the BBC provides (through in-depth qualitative public research), rather than merely assessing the BBC’s performance on quota fulfilments or rote audience measurement.

## Your views

- Do you support new Public Purposes for the BBC as a local, international and/or technological public service?
- Are there other new or revised Public Purposes that should be included in the BBC’s next Royal Charter?
- How could Ofcom’s evaluation of how the BBC is fulfilling the Public Purposes be improved?

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# The Village Common: A British digital commons platform for civic connection and trusted public media

## Independent Media Association

*The next BBC Royal Charter should create The Village Common: a British digital commons platform delivered as part of the licence fee settlement. The platform would combine trusted news and public-purpose content with groups-first social participation, enabling people to find information, discover communities, and take part in civic life without the divisive incentives of commercial social media.*

*The Village Common would begin as a low-cost pilot and scale into a core part of the modern licence fee offer — a universal digital service for the 21st century.*

### Background

The BBC was founded to provide universal public access to new communication technologies — first radio, then television. Today, civic life increasingly takes place in digital spaces, yet those spaces are largely shaped by commercial incentives that reward division, anonymity, and attention capture.

At the same time, Britain faces rising loneliness, isolation, and social fragmentation. A modern public service broadcaster should therefore help provide shared civic infrastructure: places where people can find trustworthy information, discover groups and events, and participate constructively in community life.

### How it would work

**Groups-first participation** - Only registered groups (e.g. choirs, book clubs, sports teams, community organisations) can post publicly. Individuals primarily participate within group spaces, moderated by those groups. Groups may be open or closed and can set their own membership criteria.

Content mix:

- BBC editorial content (clearly labelled)
- Regulated independent publisher content (clearly labelled)
- Community group updates
- A built-in Village Common Noticeboard and calendar for events and activities

Responsibility and moderation - Legal responsibility for posts sits with the posting group. A clear code of conduct and low-cost complaints process, modelled on established regulatory standards (e.g. IMPRESS), enables escalation: warning → suspension → removal, with independent arbitration.

The Village Common is not an advertising platform, an anonymous ‘town square’, or a BBC editorial monopoly. It is public digital infrastructure, designed for civic value rather than virality.

**A £10 public media voucher (The ‘McChesney model’)** - Alongside the platform, a £10 per-payer public media voucher could be introduced as part of any licence-fee uplift. Citizens would allocate this to regulated publishers or registered community groups via The Village Common. This reinforces participation, strengthens legitimacy, and links public funding directly to public choice and engagement.

### Benefits

Within 12–24 months, The Village Common would:

- Make it easier to find groups, events, and shared interests — reducing isolation and strengthening community life;
- Provide a healthier digital public sphere, centred on accountable groups and trusted sources;
- Offer a tangible, modern justification for the licence fee as a universal digital service.

The Village Common advances the Charter Review’s aims by:

- Enhancing accountability and public engagement, through transparent participation structures;
- Supporting social cohesion and digital inclusion;
- Acting as a driver of innovation, providing public digital infrastructure outside commercial incentives;
- Working in partnership with independent media and civil society;
- Reinforcing the BBC’s universal mission, updating “educate, inform and entertain” for the digital age.

### Your views

- Should the BBC’s future remit include providing civic digital infrastructure alongside broadcasting?
- Does a groups-first participation model offer a healthier alternative to individual-centric social media?
- What level of verification is proportionate for registered groups?
- What features matter most: trusted news, group spaces, or the public noticeboard?
- Should such a platform become a core part of the licence-fee offer over time?

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# A new media literacy Public Purpose for the BBC

Lee Edwards, London School of Economics and Political Science

*The Government's Green Paper includes suggestions for a new public purpose for the BBC to deliver media literacy interventions. The BBC already conducts a considerable number of initiatives relating to media literacy of various kinds (e.g. BBC Bitesize, Stop the Scam, Solve the Story).*

*However, it tends to operate in isolation from the non-profit organisations and experts that currently work on media literacy in the UK, and from Ofcom, which is responsible for media literacy as part of its obligations under the Online Safety Act. This limits the mutual benefit that could be derived from more cooperation.*

*This proposal is for a Public Purpose that requires the BBC to deliver media literacy interventions in collaboration with the rest of the sector, drawing on its organisational strengths as a source of expertise in media creation; a source of national networks of media workers that can facilitate media literacy across the UK's regions and devolved nations; and as a source of content for media literacy programmes implemented by others.*

## Background

Media literacy in the UK has a 30 year history but is enjoying an increasingly high profile since the advent of the Online Safety Act, which set out obligations for Ofcom to support and monitor media literacy, and the 2025 Curriculum and Assessment Review, which incorporates media literacy as a compulsory school subject for the first time.

Ofcom has put a three-year media literacy strategy in place, in line with its legal obligations, which has facilitated a more strategic approach to the topic in some areas. Ofcom also acts as an important convenor for the sector. Nonetheless, the media literacy sector faces many challenges, including a lack of sustainable funding, more fragmentation than coordination, and a lack of clear leadership and direction at Government level.

The BBC does currently deliver media literacy resources and activities, but it is not particularly well-connected with the sector and it tends to deliver these resources in isolation from other initiatives.

The proposals in the Green Paper for the BBC to deliver media literacy do not acknowledge this context other than recognising that other organisations also work on media literacy. The assumption appears to be that having the BBC deliver media literacy content will inevitably help to raise media literacy levels across the population. However, the BBC already does a considerable amount of media literacy work, so that the proposed new Public Purpose effectively enshrines existing practice, rather than trying to improve it or maximise the benefits that it might generate.

## Rationale

In other countries, public service broadcasters play an important role in the provision of media literacy, but they do so in conjunction with the wider network of organisations, individuals and institutions that structure media literacy provision for different audiences. In other words, the role of public service media in media literacy provision is collaborative. This is in line with their obligations to serve the wider public interest, because media literacy is both complex and difficult to deliver at scale and requires cooperation across multiple actors. It is not a 'one-size-fits-all' tool, but has to be tailored to the lives and circumstances of the people being addressed.

Therefore, while a Public Purpose for the BBC to deliver media literacy is welcome, if it is only required to do so as a stand-alone effort, the value of its work as a public interest intervention is necessarily limited. Instead, such

a Public Purpose needs to be situated in the context of current media literacy work in the UK, and maximise the BBC's organisational strengths that would benefit the wider media literacy sector.

### How it would work

A new Public Purpose for media literacy would be introduced that confirms the BBC's value as a source of media literacy expertise and resources, but also consolidates its importance as a partner, rather than a lone actor, in delivering media literacy across the UK. For example, the Purpose may read:

The BBC should support media literacy for people of all ages, in collaboration with Ofcom as the institution responsible for media literacy. It should facilitate media literacy in conjunction with providers across the devolved nations and regions, drawing on its strengths as a source of expertise in media creation; a source of national networks of media workers that can facilitate media literacy across the UK's regions and devolved nations; and a source of content for media literacy programmes implemented by others.

### Benefits

Introducing a new Public Purpose for media literacy that is grounded in both the realities of the sector and the BBC's strengths and potential contribution, would have a number of benefits.

First, it would ensure the BBC's work is accounted for and incorporated into the work that Ofcom leads as part of its media literacy strategy, ensuring strategic coherence between the BBC's work and the wider sector.

Second, it would ensure that the BBC's considerable resources and expertise are used in support of other organisations who are trying to deliver media literacy to a wide range of communities, often in difficult circumstances.

Finally, it would reinforce the BBC's commitment to combating the dysfunctions of the information environment through a commitment to public education and empowerment.

### Your views

- Do you agree with the proposed new public purpose about media literacy?
- Are there other things you would highlight or reinforce as part of the BBC's commitment to media literacy?
- How do you think the BBC's work on media literacy could be enforced?

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# Recognising the importance of cultural and non-factual programming as ‘Windows onto the World’ for audiences

## International Broadcasting Trust

*To recognise the value of cultural and entertainment programming as a means for audiences to understand the world, rather than reserving this role only for news and current affairs and factual programming. To alter the public purpose of delivering news and information so that it explicitly incorporates a duty to provide a range of programmes and entertainment to keep audiences informed about the world.*

### Background

At its best, the BBC provides a window onto the world for mass audiences that remain unparalleled by other media. Without this window, it's harder for citizens to understand the world around them. They are less likely to empathise with people beyond our borders, less able to situate political and social challenges within the world that shapes them, and less inclined to support actions and campaigns to address global injustices.

The unique social and democratic function expected from the BBC's international news and current affairs is clearly articulated in its first Public Purpose. The current Royal Charter obliges the BBC to: “provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them” that ensures audiences can engage with “global issues and participate in the democratic process, at all levels, as active and informed citizens”. However, our research shows coverage of global affairs is declining across the BBC's main bulletins and its news agenda is narrow and lacking distinctiveness.

Our latest research into the breadth and depth of international coverage across various broadcasters, led by Professor Martin Scott from the University of East Anglia, has revealed an alarming decline in the proportion of international stories featured on the BBC's flagship news programme. The proportion of international stories featured on BBC News at Ten has declined by 12% in just ten years; from 50% in 2016 to just 38% in January of 2026.

This relatively low proportion of international news coverage was recorded during a sample period of unusually intense geopolitical upheaval, in January 2026. Significant stories during this period included the abduction of the Venezuelan President, protests across Iran, the opening of the Rafa border crossing in Gaza, ‘peace talks’ between Ukraine and Russia, and threats from the US President to annex Greenland. Meanwhile, many of the BBC's competitors (Channel 4 News, Sky News, Al Jazeera English) have maintained high levels of global coverage and forged distinctive international news offerings that include under-reported, but very important, stories emerging from Sudan, Syria, Myanmar, Iraq, and far beyond.

### Rationale

The Charter Renewal process is the perfect (and perhaps last) opportunity to address the failures of BBC News to provide unique windows onto the world. Through minor changes to the Public Purposes and the accompanying Framework Agreement, the government can establish clear obligations on the BBC to provide a distinctive and wide-ranging news agenda; one that genuinely helps audiences understand our interconnected and interdependent world in which events overseas directly and indirectly impact our lives at home.

In an age of growing news avoidance and distrust of legacy media, however, the BBC's international obligations must extend far beyond news and current affairs to encompass all genres and programme types. By harnessing its entertainment programmes, the BBC has unique platforms through which it can introduce audiences to key

international issues, distant communities, and diverse cultures across the world. What some describe as the ‘Eastenders effect’.

Its wider portfolio of factual programmes provide incredible opportunities for building understanding and connections across the globe. When Nadiya Hussain travels to Bangladesh for a cooking programme or the comedian Romesh Ranganathan tours Rwanda, audiences are entertained and informed and cultural barriers are gently dismantled. Crucially, the audiences for these programmes will include the growing number of people who rarely, if ever, watch the news.

### How it would work

If the BBC is to remain “fundamental to the health of our democracy”, as the Culture Secretary describes it in the Foreword to the Green Paper, it needs to pay closer attention to the power of stories about the world and, crucially, not delegate responsibility for informing audiences about the world to news and current affairs. Again, we believe this shift in emphasis and attention can be achieved through modest changes to the BBC’s Public Purposes:

To provide impartial news and information **a range of other programmes** to help people understand and engage with the world around them: the BBC should provide duly accurate and impartial news, current affairs, **entertainment** and factual programming to build people’s understanding of all parts of the United Kingdom and of the wider world.

### Benefits

Amending the BBC’s Public Purposes – to expand its obligations to international coverage – would underline the importance of informing and educating audiences about global affairs and remind the BBC that this can and must be achieved whilst entertaining the audience. It does not dilute or diminish the importance of international news and current affairs, but reminds us that different approaches are needed if the BBC is to fulfil its obligation to ensure audiences can engage fully with “global issues and participate in the democratic process, at all levels, as active and informed citizens”, as set out in its first Public Purpose. Greater awareness of global affairs and closer understanding of people, cultures, places, and perspectives from around the world can only make a positive contribution to our democracy, our society, and our discourse.

### Your views

- Do you think the BBC should provide a range of news stories that is distinctive and different from other broadcasters and newspapers?
- Do you think that BBC News television bulletins (e.g. BBC News at Ten) are achieving a reasonable balance of stories from across the world?
- Do you think that BBC News provides you with sufficient information about global current affairs for you to adequately understand events at home and abroad?

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# The world's first fully sustainability-integrated public broadcaster

Jack Shelbourn, University of Lincoln

*Environmental sustainability should be embedded as a core operational and creative duty within the BBC's Royal Charter. The BBC has an opportunity to become the world's first fully sustainability-integrated public broadcaster: not merely measuring emissions, but structurally reshaping commissioning, regulation and craft practice to reduce environmental impact at source.*

*Embedding sustainability at Charter level would require recalibration of certain production norms and audience expectations. However, it would position the BBC as a technological, creative and ethical leader in a carbon-constrained era, strengthening UK soft power while generating exportable standards, training and production frameworks.*

## Background

The BBC is an energy-intensive image-producing institution whose public value depends upon lighting, cameras, transport logistics, power infrastructure and digital distribution. Yet the Charter Review Green Paper largely treats the BBC as a governance and funding issue.

Sustainability appears primarily through BAFTA *albert* certification and carbon reporting, but it is not embedded as a Charter duty, regulatory requirement, or commissioning principle shaping everyday production decisions.

Sector initiatives led by the BFI and BAFTA *albert*, including A Screen New Deal, have identified the scale of change required for Net Zero transition. However, research examining *albert's* impact (including work by Leora Hadas) suggests that while carbon accounting improves awareness, it does not consistently transform department-level craft decisions.

Reporting frameworks alone do not reliably alter lighting strategy, scheduling patterns, unit scale or transport planning, particularly in fragmented production environments such as regional news and factual units. Without structural reform, sustainability risks remaining administrative rather than operational.

## Rationale

Carbon reporting is necessary but insufficient. The most significant emissions levers sit within craft and workflow: lighting design, power planning, scheduling, mobility and digital processes. Unless sustainability is embedded at commissioning and department level, reform remains superficial. Contemporary television has normalised high-energy production norms: global mobility, compressed schedules, night shooting and uniform high-intensity lighting.

These practices are culturally embedded rather than environmentally neutral. Climate transition will require recalibration of scale, speed and aesthetic expectation. This will be uncomfortable, but preserving existing norms in a carbon-constrained world carries greater long-term institutional risk.

Structural leadership also offers strategic advantage. Early adoption of higher environmental standards can generate exportable expertise and regulatory influence. A fully sustainability-integrated BBC could shape international commissioning norms and reinforce UK cultural leadership in a period of technological and geopolitical transition.

## How it would work

1. **Charter obligation:** The Royal Charter should recognise environmental sustainability as a core operational duty of public service broadcasting, either through an additional Public Purpose or an explicit obligation to lead in sustainable production practice with transparent reporting.
2. **Regulatory Oversight:** Ofcom should incorporate environmental performance indicators alongside financial and audience metrics, with annual reporting that includes production-level environmental impact and benchmarked progress.
3. **Commissioning Reform:** Sustainability must be embedded at greenlight stage. All commissions should require carbon-aware production strategies, department-level sustainability planning, and named accountability for environmental performance.
4. **Department-Level Integration:** Sustainability requirements should extend directly into camera, lighting, production design and post-production workflows, where energy demand is materially determined.
5. **Sustainable Production Training:** The BBC should establish structured training in sustainable production craft, including natural-light and reflected-light methodologies, low-energy scheduling, grid-first power strategies and sustainable digital workflows. This would position the BBC not only as a content exporter, but as a standards exporter.

## Benefits

Embedding sustainability at Charter level would align environmental responsibility with the BBC's public mission while creating long-term institutional resilience: credible climate leadership, exportable standards and a workforce prepared for a carbon-constrained future.

Maintaining sustainability primarily as a reporting add-on risks falling behind regulatory, technological and climate realities. The Charter Review is a rare opportunity to embed sustainability structurally rather than rhetorically.

## Your views

- Should environmental sustainability be embedded within the BBC's Public Purposes and Charter obligations?
- How should Ofcom incorporate environmental accountability alongside financial and audience metrics?
- Should commissioning require department-level sustainability strategies at greenlight stage?
- What training is required to embed sustainable practice across craft departments?

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# Decolonizing the BBC: Integrating non-Western models to break political-business collusion

## The Kurdish Media Watchdog Organization (CHMK)

*We propose the introduction of the “Integrity Walls” framework, a structural blueprint born from the “hard-won” lessons of the post-conflict Kurdish media landscape as a structural barrier to insulate public media from elite capture.*

*By bridging the gap between non-Western journalism cultures and the British context and integrating these non-western insights, the proposal reimagines the BBC as a global commons and provides a strategic roadmap to enhance editorial independence and ensure that public service media remains resilient against algorithmic manipulation and partisan interference in the age of artificial intelligence.*

*This submission serves as both a policy roadmap and an invitation for global reciprocity, where innovation from the margins is essential for the survival of independent public interest journalism worldwide.*

### Background

The BBC is currently confronting a critical crisis of "elite capture," a condition where the boundaries between executive political power and independent media governance have become dangerously porous.

As a media scholar from the post-conflict context of Kurdistan, I observe that the vulnerabilities currently facing British public broadcasting mirror the systemic political-business collusion that has long challenged non-Western journalism cultures. Drawing on the empirical outcomes and strategic resolutions of the First (2021) and Second (2025) CHMK National Forums on Media Reform, this proposal argues that the BBC can no longer rely on the "gentlemanly agreements" or soft norms of impartiality that defined its past. In an era of globalized digital threats and AI-driven manipulation, the institution requires a structural decolonization.

By integrating the "Integrity Walls" framework, developed by CHMK.org and its National Media Reform Forums to survive volatile political environments—this submission provides a blueprint for replacing fragile norms with hard, legally codified structural barriers. Decolonizing the BBC in this manner ensures it evolves into a resilient global commons, insulated from the specific interests of the political and corporate elite.

### Rationale

Our research and recommendations at the CHMK National Forum on Media Reform indicates that in regions where political and commercial interests are deeply intertwined, such as the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, traditional Western “soft norms” of journalism cultures are insufficient.

The BBC’s current vulnerability to government influence over appointments and funding mirrors the systemic “party-business ties” we have fought to sever in Kurdistan. Evidence suggests that the BBC’s proximity to state power has led to a decline in global trust.

By viewing the BBC through a Global South lens, we identify that its governance is still rooted in a centralized, state-adjacent model. The “Integrity Walls” framework, developed out of necessity in the Kurdish context, provides a tested blueprint for creating hard structural barriers that prevent the merger of political, corporate, and media power.

## How it would work

**Method A: The Structural "Oversight Wall"** (Governance Reform) – Amend the Royal Charter to replace government-led appointments with an Independent National Media Council, modelled on the recommendations of the 2025 CHMK Forum. Governance would be transitioned to a meritocratic assembly of academics, civil society leaders, and media practitioners. This legally removes the BBC from the executive branch's orbit.

**Method B: The Economic Firewall** (Anti-Collusion Reform) – Establish legal prohibitions within the Charter to prevent "Elite Capture." Individuals with significant business ties to political parties or government contractors would be barred from holding executive or senior editorial power, effectively severing the business-political collusion that threatens editorial independence.

**Method C: The De-colonial Reciprocity Wall** (External Audit) – Open the BBC's governance and impartiality audits to international observers from non-Western academic institutions, including CHMK.org monitors. This creates a global "reciprocity" where the BBC is audited through a de-colonial lens, ensuring that its "impartiality" is not merely a reflection of localized British political biases but adheres to a global standard of the "Global Commons."

## Benefits

The BBC would transition from a state-adjacent entity to a resilient Global Commons, benefiting from "Innovation from the Margin" and synthesis of global expertise. However, failure to implement these hard firewalls will lead to a total collapse of public trust and the eventual domination of the BBC by conglomerates of commercial-political partners.

## Your views

- How can the BBC benefit from the specific "integrity safeguards" developed by Kurdish media watchdogs in emerging democracies like Kurdistan Region of Iraq?
- Should the BBC Charter include a mandate for "Global Reciprocity," allowing non-Western academic institutions to audit its impartiality?

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# Funding the BBC and public media



# The British Cultural Pass: A sovereign wealth fund for British culture

Andrew Smith

*The British Cultural Pass (BCP) is not a renamed licence fee. It is a new independent entity — a British Cultural Sovereign Wealth Fund — that collects money from three sources and distributes it to three beneficiaries. Its long-term purpose is not to defund or diminish the BBC, but to grow the entire British creative sector, with the BBC at its heart, so that over time the world — not just the UK public — funds British culture.*

## Background

The licence fee is broken. It is a flat-rate charge that takes no account of income, is evaded by an estimated 10–15% of households, and hands government direct control over BBC funding — creating permanent political interference in public broadcasting. Thousands of people, disproportionately women on low incomes, face prosecution for non-payment each year.

But the answer is not to defund the BBC or retreat to general taxation. The answer is to build a bigger, more resilient funding ecosystem — one in which the BBC is protected and grows, the wider creative sector thrives alongside it, and the British public becomes a co-owner of the culture they fund rather than simply paying for it.

## Rationale

The British Cultural Pass is a long-term project. In the short term it delivers fairer household contributions, ends criminal prosecutions and removes political interference. In the medium term, as BBC+ grows its global subscriber base and the Creative Pot builds a catalogue of British IP, new revenue streams reduce the burden on UK households. In the long term, the BCP becomes increasingly self-funding — a rising tide that lifts the BBC, independent producers, arts organisations and the public alike.

The IP revenue share is central to this long-term vision. When the Creative Pot funds a show, the BCP takes a permanent co-investor share of all revenues — streaming, merchandise, licensing, sequels, spin-offs — in perpetuity. Creators and studios retain their own share as in any co-production model. But the British public, as funder, receives its proportionate return forever. Over decades, as the catalogue grows, these returns compound. A show funded today could be generating revenue for the BCP in 30 years.

## How it would work

The BCP is a new independent entity governed as a mutual, with members electing the board. The household contribution level is set by Ofcom, not government. It operates across four pillars:

- Fairer collection: Household contributions scaled to council tax bands. Non-payment decriminalised. One payment covers all screens. Contribution level set independently by Ofcom.
- Broader funding base: Studio levy (BBC, ITV, Netflix, RTL) and global BBC+ revenues bring new money into the system that does not exist today, reducing household costs while growing the total pot.
- Creative Pot and IP: Open competitive fund for any creative organisation. British hiring required. After 12 months exclusivity, content available on BCP platform. BCP retains a permanent revenue share in all funded IP — including merchandise, licensing and sequels — with returns flowing back into the fund.
- Cultural Credits: Every member receives credits to spend on content, newspaper subscriptions, museum entry and cultural experiences of their own choosing — putting genuine agency back in the hands of the public.

- Policy mechanism: Primary legislation replacing the Communications Act 2003 licence fee provisions; Royal Charter amendment to establish mutual governance; new Ofcom powers to set contribution levels and oversee the studio levy; an IP co-ownership framework administered by the BFI as custodian of the national content catalogue.

	Money In	Money Out
1	UK households – via council tax bands (majority would pay less than today)	The BBC – guaranteed, protected, political independent funding
2	Studios and broadcasters – via a levy on those operating in the UK	The Creative Pot – a competitive open fund for any British creative organisation
3	Global revenue – BBC+ international subscriptions, advertising and IP returns	Cultural Credits – returned to every member to spend on culture as they choose

## Benefits

Success means:

- A BBC that is better funded, genuinely independent and growing — not despite the BCP but because of it.
- A thriving independent creative sector with access to competitive public funding for the first time.
- A British public that co-owns the culture it funds and receives a share of its global commercial success. Household contributions that fall over time as global revenues grow.
- Criminal prosecutions ended.
- Government interference structurally removed.

The alternatives — general taxation, broadband levy, full commercialisation — each fail on independence, fairness or the universal service principle, and none of them build a long-term self-sustaining asset. The BCP is the only model that simultaneously protects the BBC, grows the creative sector, reduces household costs and builds a permanent national cultural asset for the British public.

## Your views

- Should public broadcasting funding come from multiple sources — households, studios and global revenues — rather than solely from a household levy?
- Should the British public receive a permanent revenue share from content funded by public money, including merchandise, licensing and sequels?
- Should the household contribution be linked to council tax bands so lower-income households pay less, with the level set by an independent body rather than government?
- Should competitive public cultural funding be open to any British creative organisation, not just the BBC?
- Do you have any further views on the British Cultural Pass proposal?

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Full proposal available from

<https://somebritthoughts.substack.com/p/the-british-cultural-pass-a-fairer>



# The Media Freedom Fund: An Arts Council-style fund to sustain regulated independent public interest media

## Independent Media Association

*Establish a Media Freedom Fund, an arms-length Arts Council-style public fund that allocates a small share of BBC public service expenditure to independent, regulated public-interest news and media organisations. The Fund would strengthen media plurality, rebuild local and investigative journalism, and extend public value into communities and audiences the BBC alone struggles to reach.*

*A defensible starting point would be 10% of the BBC's News & Current Affairs budget (approximately £32 million per year), amounting to less than 1% of the BBC's total expenditure. Funding would be restricted to independent, externally regulated publishers, ensuring high standards, editorial independence, and public accountability.*

### Background

Britain's civic life is becoming more fragmented. Local news has collapsed across much of the country, investigative capacity has weakened, and many communities no longer see themselves reflected in national media. At the same time, the digital information environment increasingly rewards division, outrage, and attention capture rather than public value.

The BBC remains one of the UK's most trusted institutions, but no single organisation — however well resourced — can represent the full plurality of British life. A universal public service, funded universally, should therefore enable a wider ecosystem of trusted, independent voices, particularly those embedded in communities and serving public-interest functions that markets alone will not sustain.

### Rationale

- **Plurality and resilience:** A democratic public sphere depends on many independent institutions able to scrutinise power, represent diverse communities, and innovate in form and voice.
- **Local accountability:** The erosion of local journalism weakens scrutiny of public institutions and reduces civic participation.
- **Audience reach and trust:** Independent, regulated publishers — including community-owned and creator-led outlets — often reach audiences the BBC finds hardest to engage, especially younger people.
- **Informational resilience:** Without a robust domestic base of regulated journalism, the UK becomes increasingly dependent on unaccountable digital incentives and external influence.
- **Economic value:** Public-interest journalism sustains skilled employment, local economies, and future media talent across the nations and regions.

### How it would work

#### **Governance**

The Fund should be administered **at arm's length from Government and the BBC**, using an Arts Council-style model with transparent criteria, published awards, and independent oversight. Neither Government nor the BBC would direct editorial outcomes.

#### **Eligibility**

- **Independent organisations only;** commercial broadcasters excluded.

- Mandatory **external regulation to a recognised high standard** (e.g. IMPRESS).
- Clear public-interest purpose and demonstrable service to a community or audience.

### **Allocation model**

To avoid politicisation or taste-based gatekeeping, the core model would provide a **baseline allocation to all eligible publishers**, creating stability and planning capacity. This can be complemented later by modest thematic pots (e.g. investigations, local reporting) if desired.

### **Accountability and evaluation**

To avoid bureaucratic overload, evaluation should focus on three indicators only:

1. **Reach** (especially in underserved communities)
2. **Trust**
3. **Perceived public value**

**A £10 public media voucher (The ‘McChesney model’)** – If the licence fee is increased during the next Charter period, a visible portion — for example **£10 per licence-fee payer per year** — could be returned as a **public media voucher**. Citizens would allocate this to eligible independent publishers or community media via the Media Freedom Fund. This strengthens democratic choice, increases perceived value for money, and channels public funding toward trusted, regulated public-interest media without undermining universal provision.

### **Benefits**

This proposal directly supports the Charter Review’s objectives by:

- **Strengthening trust and accountability**, through funding only externally regulated providers;
- **Supporting media plurality**, especially in local and underserved areas;
- **Driving growth and good jobs** across the nations and regions;
- **Working in partnership** with independent media rather than displacing them;
- **Maximising public value**, by extending the BBC’s public purposes beyond in-house output while preserving editorial independence.

### **Your views**

- Should the next Charter include a duty for the BBC to support the wider public-interest media ecosystem?
- What eligibility standards best guarantee independence and accountability for public funding?
- Is allocating a small share of News & Current Affairs expenditure an appropriate mechanism?
- Which outcomes should be prioritised: local reporting, investigations, youth engagement, or diversity of voices?
- What safeguards are needed to prevent political or commercial capture of such a fund?

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# The Public Media Levy: A modern, fair and progressive funding model

Tom Chivers, Goldsmiths University of London

*The TV licence fee is outdated, unfair, regressive and has failed to provide sustainable funding for the BBC's essential public services. As part of the BBC's next Royal Charter, the licence fee should be abolished and replaced by a new public funding model – the Public Media Levy.*

*The Public Media Levy would be applied to all UK households, to enshrine and empower the BBC's mission to serve the needs and interests of all audiences. It would be collected via the existing council tax system and have its value determined independently of government. The Levy would modernise the BBC's funding: providing it with a guaranteed base of income, ending the unfair licence fee enforcement regime, and allowing for progressive discounts and exemptions that reflect different households' ability to pay.*

## Background

The BBC's next Royal Charter is likely to span a period of continued revolutionary changes in the media landscape. Yet despite the persistent shift away from broadcasting as UK audiences' main way of watching audiovisual content, policymakers have for decades failed to tackle the clear need to reform the TV licence fee.

Currently, households are required to pay the licence fee if they consume any live television (including channels not operated by the BBC) or consume content from BBC iPlayer. This means that the BBC draws a substantial portion of its funding for all its radio, online and television services from a steadily shrinking base. TV-viewing households that do not watch the BBC are required to pay, while households who use only BBC radio or its online news platforms are not. The enforcement regime for non-payment – which at its extremes can lead to a criminal charge - is also costly and unfair, as many prosecutions of vulnerable people have shown.

Successive below-inflation funding deals, licence fee freezes and 'top slicing' of the BBC's income have wrecked the BBC's financial standing. Since 2010, the BBC's public income has fallen by almost 40% in real terms, leading to extensive cuts to services and widespread job losses across BBC news and local radio. Even with recent inflation-linked rises in the licence fee (now £180 per year), this sustained period of stagnant income means that BBC audiences are being charged more for a public service that is providing less than before.

## Rationale

The TV licence fee needs radical reform, both to restore the BBC's financial sustainability and to provide a fairer payment model for UK households. However, the Government's Green Paper on BBC Charter renewal rules out any public funding alternatives for the BBC. Its proposed reforms amount to little more than tinkering at the edges of a deeply unpopular and failed funding model, describing the licence fee as "tried and tested" without any evidence or basis to support this.

Licence fee evasion (i.e. households that meet the licence fee's conditions but do not pay) has been steadily rising, currently estimated at 3.2 million households of 12.5% of those eligible – amounting to £546m in 'lost' BBC income. Additionally, approximately 2.8m UK households do not meet the licensable conditions. This figure is set to rise considerably as households move away from live TV, or opt not to engage with consistently shrinking BBC services. Unless the Government implements a robust mechanism to significantly cut evasion or to expand the TV licence fee to other media (e.g. radio or streaming platforms), by 2040 – the likely end of the next BBC Charter – it is possible that fewer than half of all UK households will be contributing to funding the BBC.

The licence fee system has the advantage that it regards the BBC's audiences as equally important in economic terms, in contrast to commercial models like advertising or subscription which seek out the largest, most homogenous or most affluent consumer base. But the licence fee is a regressive method for financing a modern public media institution, and leaves the BBC dangerously exposed to political interference – as shown by unilateral government settlements that have provided neither independence nor economic security. The licence fee also fails to reflect that public media benefits British society, culture and democracy for everybody in the UK, regardless of media services used, devices in the home or even direct interaction with the BBC.

## How it would work

The future of the BBC depends on a radically reformed, modern public funding model that is progressively rated, independent of government and supports a universal service across media platforms, while also acknowledging differences in the ability of households to contribute. **The TV licence fee should be replaced by a Public Media Levy.** Rather than linking public funding for the BBC to particular devices or services, the Levy would embody the principle that collective national investment in independent, universal public media is essential for a healthy democracy, social cohesion and cultural expression.

**The Public Media Levy would be collected through council tax, and offer concessionary rates or exemptions to households that are less able to contribute.** This might include lower income households, single occupants or those in receipt of public welfare. Progressive rating should not mean wealthier households paying more, as this would create an incentive for the BBC to cater to this audience at the expense of others.

**The power to set the level of the Public Media Levy would be given to an independent body.** This body would be tasked with evaluating the financial needs of the BBC to fulfil its public service obligations, and determine a secure long-term funding settlement based on its assessment. This would also ensure that the BBC's funding is properly ringfenced, in contrast to a tax-based model that would be vulnerable to political capture.

## Benefits

By expanding the BBC's overall base of public income, the shift to a Public Media Levy could increase investment in the BBC while allowing for a reduction in the per-household costs. Collection via existing council tax mechanisms would require careful scrutiny and management, though it could also increase the BBC's accountability to regional audiences and encourage greater investment in local content.

Transitioning to a new funding system is essential to ensure that all UK citizens have universal, equal access to media content that informs, educates and entertains free at the point of use. A significant increase in the BBC's funding is necessary to reverse decades of decline, but this can only take place alongside democratic reforms to the BBC as a public institution – in particular by giving the British public a more direct and active role in how the BBC is run and governed.

## Your views

- Should the TV licence fee be kept as it is, expanded to include a wider range of media devices or BBC services, or replaced entirely by universal funding applied to all households irrespective of media use?
- What measures or models should be introduced to create a fairer and more progressive system for funding the BBC, for example by applying discounts or exemptions based on household income?
- What body or process would be most effective for collecting, evaluating and/or setting a household fee or levy for funding the BBC? How should the independence of the BBC's funding be protected?

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# An advertiser-free future for BBC content and services

## CPBF North

*The government proposes that the BBC could take advertising, but the implications of doing so go far beyond what the Green Paper identifies. Advertising would influence programme decisions and content, integrate the BBC into invasive online ad markets, undermine universality and threaten the distinctiveness and viability of BBC services. A deeper discussion is needed so that the new Charter protects the BBC and wider public service media from the influence and consequences of advertising.*

### Background

Apart from expensive subscription services, very little of our media today is ad-free. This makes the BBC unique in providing services free from the direct influence of advertisers on what is said and shown, funded, produced, promoted and presented.

Up to now, the BBC has been prohibited from having advertising on any of its public service channels and radio stations, or on iPlayer and its other platforms. The Green Paper proposes that the BBC could take advertising and is consulting on whether to have targeted advertising on the BBC's online platforms (such as the website [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) and on its YouTube channel) or 'full advertising across all BBC platforms'.

The Green Paper acknowledges that the BBC's unique value sets it 'apart from other global media providers with different production values and commercial interests, and which often prioritise content with global appeal and commercial incentives'. Yet, when respondents are asked (Question 28 in the survey) whether the BBC should take advertising, the prompts offer only two considerations: the impact on the 'audience experience' and the economic impact on other broadcasters. But advertising would have much greater consequences than the brief, selective comments in the Green Paper identify.

The wider context is rapid and far-reaching change across media and marketing around both the opportunities for hyper-personalised advertising – for instance on today's smart 'connected' TVs – and the ever-growing needs of commercial media companies, apps, influencers and others to attract ad revenue, as giant platforms like Google and Meta take the largest share. Broadcasters like NBC Universal have announced plans to use their consumer data to sell virtual product placement ads in shows based on who is watching. More and more content is influenced by advertising, from product placement and advertiser-financed programmes to sponsored podcasts, influencer marketing and beyond.

### Rationale

Advertising is not just an option for funding, because it has effects that go far beyond that. The alternative to the Green Paper requires a deeper consideration of the implications of taking advertising and the value of ad-free public service media in a world dominated by commercial media and marketers.

Advertising influences what content is selected and presented to us, based not on our choices but on what advertisers want. In an increasingly commercialised media ecosystem it will become more important, not less, that there are contents, advice and viewpoints free from serving the interests of sponsors. Brands would love to draw on the BBC's trust, quality and independence, but in doing so they would weaken and ultimately destroy all those values.

Advertising is not just a 'top up' source of funding, it has impacts. If the BBC were dependent on advertising this would quickly make many services unviable. In combination, advertising and subscription would lead to a

shrunk BBC that superserved those with the financial resources to pay or to be attractive to advertisers, and underserved everyone else.

It would undermine universality in other ways. It would make services like iPlayer appear different for each user, based not on their interests and choice of content but on the basis of what advertisers wished to serve them.

The modern arrangements for advertising involve collecting vast amounts of data to serve individuals and households with targeted ads. Bringing the BBC into this ad ecosystem would have far-reaching implications including for data privacy.

An ad-funding model for the BBC would not provide sustainable funding, fair value or universality.

### How it would work

The new Royal Charter would retain ad-free BBC services. There should be no advertising or commercial sponsorship on any BBC public services. Rules for advertising on BBC commercial services would not allow any interference with editorial autonomy. All forms of brand-funded content or services, such as product placement, sponsorship (or branded content), would be prohibited across the BBC.

### Benefits

Arguments *for* advertising are that it could reduce the amount that households pay for BBC services. However, no cost benefit analysis has been carried out in support of this claim or to address the wider implications. The Green Paper repeatedly identifies commercial media's opposition to BBC market share, and the dire loss of ad revenue that publishers and broadcasters face, so the proposal to allow advertising on the BBC raises many more questions than are answered.

### Your views

The Green Paper already asks for views on whether to allow the BBC to carry advertising on its online platforms or all services. We want to ask further questions:

- What value do you place on the BBC continuing to provide ad-free content and services?
- Should the BBC be independent of the influence of advertisers, and, if so, how can that be achieved?
- Should there be restrictions to prevent brand-funded content on BBC commercial services?

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# The Democracy Dividend

Andrew Lindsay

*The BBC is a key, historic institution that is respected across the world and serves as a foundational pillar of the UK's democratic and cultural life. However, the UK's media landscape is currently facing a "perfect storm" of technological disruption and audience fragmentation that threatens the future of Public Service Media.*

*The traditional television licence fee is a regressive anachronism disconnected from modern consumption habits, creating a "doom loop" in which a shrinking tax base leads to rising costs and a loss of public legitimacy.*

*To secure the BBC's future, I propose the abolition of the licence fee, which would be replaced by The Democracy Dividend, a diversified multi-stream funding model targeting £4.2 billion in revenue to allow the Corporation (or any replacement) to continue and future-proof its work, while tackling fundamental issues inherent in the current system.*

## Background

**Preventing a commercial race to the bottom** – We must emphatically reject the notion that full commercialisation is a viable solution. A fully commercial model risks a "race to the bottom", in which truth itself becomes vulnerable to commercial interference and sensationalism.

**An ad-free BBC acts as a vital "dam" against commercial saturation;** without this benchmark, commercial breaks on UK channels could increase by 50% to approach the US norm of 14-16 minutes per hour. Maintaining a non-commercial, independent public service media provider is the only effective way to hold back the tide of excessive advertising, misinformation, and disinformation.

## How it would work

**The quadripartite funding structure** – To achieve fiscal sustainability and social equity, the **Democracy Dividend** proposes rebalancing the financial burden away from households and towards the tech giants and commercial entities that profit most from the UK's content ecosystem. Yet the public must still enjoy majority ownership for the ownership of British democracy.

I propose the following pillars:

- **Citizens' Democracy Levy:** A progressive, tiered payment integrated with Council Tax. This residency-based model ends the criminalisation of vulnerable groups and cuts costs for the poorest households (Band A) by 65%, reducing their contribution to roughly £5.00 per month.
- **International Commercial Efficiency:** Expanding BBC Studios' global operations to return a reliable annual dividend, targeting £300 million in net profit.
- **Commercial media & device levy:** Applying a 'polluter pays' principle via a 1-2% wholesale levy on hardware (smartphones, 4K screens) and a 1% turnover levy on legacy media groups. Crucially, a 0% rate on refurbished and second-hand goods will act as a green measure to incentivise a circular economy.
- **Hypothecated Digital Services Tax (DST):** Ring-fencing 50% of current 2% Digital Services Tax receipts (£400m) to support the content ecosystem that digital platforms have disrupted.

The amount of support each pillar is expected to provide can be adjusted. For example, a higher Digital Services Tax or larger levy on luxury items, such as large 4k TVs, would diminish the return required from the Citizens' Democracy Levy.

## Benefits

**Governance and press freedom** - True media freedom is contingent upon economic independence. Britain is currently ranked 20th out of 180 in the Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) press freedom index. Seventeen European neighbours are ranked higher. This Charter review process could be significantly better informed by learning from the better governance structures for public service media found in those nations. A funding model dependent on the volatile whims of the commercial market or the discretionary allocation of government grants is vulnerable to capture.

Therefore, this framework proposes a statutory trust mechanism, in line with Media Reform Coalition proposals, to manage these funds, ensuring media freedom is enshrined as a right of the citizen, rather than a discretionary gift of the state.

**Revitalising local journalism** – Finally, this model addresses the severe democratic deficit affecting the 4.4 million citizens currently living in “news deserts”. Using the surplus generated by the commercial levies, a new Public Interest Journalism Fund would finance a massive expansion of the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) from 165 to more than 500 reporters. This targeted investment will ensure every council, health trust, and police commissioner faces dedicated, independent scrutiny, restoring accountability to local communities across the UK.

## Your views

- Would you prefer to pay a smaller, progressive household levy linked to your council tax band, or continue paying the current £180.00 flat-rate TV licence?
- Do you agree that tech giants and hardware manufacturers should contribute a percentage of their UK revenues to a 'Public Interest Journalism Fund' to protect local communities against “news deserts”, where the local press has collapsed?
- Should the BBC's funding be taken out of the hands of the government and managed by an independent statutory trust to ensure genuine media freedom and protect it from political interference?



# Production, commissioning and the creative workforce



# Empowering the creative workforce in every nation and region of the UK

## Equity, the UK's largest creative industries trade union

*The BBC is a lynchpin of the creative industries and a key employer and trainer of the UK's creative workforce, but its potential to generate growth across the UK and drive up terms and conditions is woefully under-realised. Equity proposes a re-founding of the BBC via three means: regionalisation, democratisation and cooperatisation.*

### Background and Rationale

Notwithstanding the rhetoric of the government and the BBC, the corporation remains firmly anchored in the capital. Film and television production is still concentrated in London and the South-East. Performers in the UK's nations and regions often struggle to find employment to sustain a career and many have to move to London for opportunities. The National Audit Office's 2024 report on the BBC's "Across the UK" regionalisation programme found that the BBC was behind schedule, had not developed a clear implementation plan and lacked an adequate way to track and measure progress. In the Midlands, the scale of the longstanding disparity in investment is particularly egregious. In 2024, the Midlands received only 3.4% of the BBC's network TV programming spend, despite being home to approximately 25% of the UK's licence fee payers.

### How it would work

An essential preliminary step towards a revitalised BBC is for **trade unions to be recognised as key partners of the BBC** in guaranteeing good jobs across the UK and rights and dignity at work, for employees and freelancers. This partnership would be established through a Workforce Covenant recognising that the BBC's commissioning and operational decisions must respond to the needs of the workforce as well as audiences, and imposing a legal duty to conduct workforce impact assessments and implement mitigation measures.

**Our first proposal is for the BBC – as a public service broadcaster funded by people in every nation and region – to be regionalised.** People across the UK should see their lives, interests and concerns reflected in the BBC's content, and should share equitably in the employment opportunities generated by the BBC. The corporation must urgently invest in under-represented areas, starting with the Midlands. The BBC should be given specific responsibilities regarding sites of production in each nation and region, and obliged to develop a clear strategy to ensure success and an effective plan to track progress.

One straightforward way to sustain regional production in under-represented parts of the UK is via the production of continuing and returning TV dramas. We note our disappointment that the Green Paper failed to include these series in its definition of underserved types of content. These series are integral to the UK production landscape in providing a training ground for cast and crew, which in turn supports the wider production ecosystem. At a minimum, Equity calls on the BBC to be required to produce a continuing or returning drama series that films for more than six months of the year in each of the UK's Ofcom-defined reporting areas.

**Second, as a civic institution, the BBC should be democratic.** In other words, the corporation must be accountable to the people who fund it and to those who create its value. Equity calls for the BBC's democratic credentials to be radically improved, as the current structure of the corporation fails to reflect the values that should animate a public institution. At the level of governance, this requires mechanisms of genuinely independent oversight that are separate from both the management of the BBC, as well as the government of the day. This would help the BBC retain its political independence, reflect a diversity of views from across the UK, and rebuild trust with the British public. Equity urges the government to reconsider its rejection in the Green

Paper of putting the BBC on a statutory footing, which would insulate it from political interference. We also advise the government to ensure that the creative workforce is represented at the highest level of the corporation, including via union voice.

**Finally, the BBC should also be cooperatised because this structure better reflects the values that underpin the corporation as a public institution.** By cooperatisation, we mean that the BBC should be reconfigured under a new structure in which it is owned and run by licence fee payers and its workforce – both those permanently employed and the thousands of freelancers that it relies on. This would not only improve the working conditions of the BBC workforce, it would also contribute towards the government’s drive to insource public services and thereby reduce the inefficiencies of the de facto internal market.

Equity proposes cooperatisation at three levels. First, the new Charter should create Workforce Panels – which would complement the Members’ Panels proposed by the Media Reform Coalition and Common Wealth – that would assess and shape the BBC’s operations. These panels would be composed of representatives from the BBC’s permanent employees as well as its freelance workforce. Second, the Charter should establish a British Digital Cooperative – as suggested by Common Wealth. The BBC would form the hub of a network of not-for-profit platforms and apps designed with the corporation’s public purposes in mind. All BBC digital services would be underpinned by algorithms that serve public service values. The BBC could use its algorithms to help users access personalised content that would better inform, educate or entertain them. These civic priorities stand in stark contrast to commercially oriented algorithms, which are wholly driven by the profit motive. Third, the BBC should encourage different models of production, such as cooperatives or mutuals. More equitably shared power is also likely to improve workplace culture outcomes.

## Benefits

In Equity’s vision of a revitalised BBC, the corporation would drive economic growth in every part of the UK, fuelling the expansion of the independent sector as well as other industries. The BBC would be the gold standard on employment rights, driving up terms and conditions for workers across the creative industries. With decent salaries, workers would be able to build lifelong careers in the performing arts and entertainment sector, whatever their background and wherever they live in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales.

## Your views

- The government and the BBC often discuss the audiences who consume BBC content, but seldom (and in the 2026 Green Paper, never) the trade unions who represent those who create that content i.e. the workforce. Do you agree or disagree with this approach?
- Do you support the BBC being regionalised, democratised and/or cooperatised?
- Do you see the BBC as an arm of the welfare state?

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# Representation, diversity and communities

# Devolution / federalisation of the BBC

David Hutchinson, Glasgow Caledonian University

*The BBC's governance structures do not reflect wider trends towards devolution, even though in practice, devolved powers are part of the accountability processes for both the BBC and Ofcom. Charter review offers an opportunity to address this important issue and re-set the relationship between the BBC and its publics in the devolved nations and regions.*

*The new Charter should therefore require the re-establishment of four Audience Councils, which should be charged with ensuring that both the managers of the Corporation, and whatever body replaces the current Board, are fully conversant with the needs and concerns of audiences in the constituent nations of the UK. Membership of the councils should be broadly representative of audiences. Their chairs should be members of whatever overall governing body is required by the new Charter.*

## Background

Constitutionally, the United Kingdom now operates under what can be described as 'asymmetrical quasi-federalism', in that there has been significant devolution of powers from Westminster to the three national governments/executive. This situation also applies, albeit informally, to the accountability mechanisms faced by broadcasters, and the super-regulator, Ofcom.

Although broadcasting as such is one area of policy not devolved, Welsh, Scottish and Northern Ireland governments/executive take a keen, often critical interest in both the BBC and the non-BBC services in their nations. And quasi-federalism is also reflected in how the BBC must present its annual reports and accounts, as specified in the current charter. They must be presented not only to the UK parliament but also to the other three jurisdictions and to the governments/executive. When the UK government appoints members of the BBC Board who represent Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland it has to seek the agreement of Scottish/Welsh and Northern Irish ministers. The Corporation is also obliged to respond to requests to appear before the three assemblies, to give evidence to them, and to submit reports. With Charter renewal, the UK government is required to consult the relevant ministers in the devolved bodies on the terms of reference, and the drafts of the proposed new charter and accompanying framework agreement it proposes to implement.

Ofcom's annual report is sent to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which lays copies of it before both houses of Parliament and the devolved bodies. The regulator has similar duties to those set out for the BBC when it comes to appearing before committees of these bodies. Holyrood ministers now appoint the Ofcom member for Scotland after consulting the relevant UK minister. Similar arrangements apply with the appointments of the Welsh and Northern Irish members.

## Rationale

Alongside these moves, though, there has been a rather startling loss of devolved power. No replacements for the BBC's Audience Councils, which had in turn replaced National Broadcasting Councils in 2007, have been established. The members of these bodies were appointed by the Corporation from outside and were meant to represent audiences, and to offer external advice. The failure to replace them is a mystery. After all, Ofcom, has advisory committees for each nation, including England. Instead of Audience Councils, there are now sub-committees of the BBC Board, with no non-BBC representation on them, other than the government appointed member for each of the four constituent UK nations. It really is passing strange that as political devolution has proceeded, the BBC has gone in the opposite direction.

I spent a number of years on the selection panel which recommended members for the then Broadcasting Council for Scotland to the Board of Governors in London. Senior executives derived much useful input and support from this body, and this is likely to be also the case in Wales and Northern Ireland. Why the abolition of the Audience Councils has not provoked a political backlash, given that it is completely contrary to the spirit of devolution, is a real puzzle.

Looking back on the whole devolution process, it can be argued that the BBC in particular could have got ahead of the game. It could have reinvented itself as a genuinely federated organisation. That would have entailed dealing with the 'England problem', when the problem had yet to be addressed properly at Westminster. Admittedly, this would have been a politically tricky course of action, but one which could well have been worth the effort and risk.

### How it would work

Genuine devolution of broadcasting would involve both finance and accountability, such that the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Ireland governments/executive would be dealing directly with broadcasters and regulatory frameworks, as independent 'actors'.

Difficult decisions about the allocation of resources would be inevitable and might well lead to the three devolved bodies augmenting the agreed share of the licence fee, or its successor, in other parts of the UK. But that could be a price worth paying for aligning the BBC rather better than it is at the moment with the evolving political structure of the UK.

Charter renewal offers the opportunity to move forward on the devolution/federalisation of the BBC.

To start this process the new Charter should therefore require the re-establishment of four Audience Councils, which should be charged with ensuring that both the managers of the Corporation, and whatever body replaces the current Board, are fully conversant with the needs and concerns of audiences in the constituent nations of the UK. Membership of the councils should be broadly representative of audiences. Their chairs should be members of whatever overall governing body is required by the new Charter.

### Your views

- How far should devolution/federalisation go within the BBC?
- What would be the implications for allocating resources from the licence fee, or from other funding sources?
- How could BBC devolution be reconciled with the need for a strong centre able to resist improper pressure from politicians and others?
- Should Ofcom also be 'federalised'?

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# Partner, facilitator and collaborator: The future of local news and the BBC

## Public Interest News Foundation

*News is changing fast. Big tech reigns supreme, audiences are polarised, young people are switching off and trust in our institutions is fading. Local news is essential to help people to engage in their communities, fight disinformation and hold power to account, but it's fighting to survive. Charter review offers an opportunity to reset the relationship between the BBC, public interest local news providers, and the public - putting local people in the driving seat.*

### Background

Journalism is going through an era of rapid change. Big tech greed has co-opted the advertising revenue and audience attention that newspapers traditionally relied on. Newspapers have had to close while social media has ballooned, leaving many people dependent on social media to get news and information. But these platforms have no stake in the UK's local communities, and have allowed misinformation to flourish, which has in turn caused conflict and even violence.

Everyone in the UK deserves public interest news that speaks to them, for them and with them, yet 4.4 million people are living in local news deserts - areas with no remaining local news outlets. Deprived communities have been hit hardest by closures in the last year. But green shoots are sprouting up across the country. Trailblazing newsrooms, such as Greater Govanhill in Glasgow, have high-street shopfronts that invite the community in to share their stories, while The Bristol Cable is collectively owned by 2,500+ local people.

The BBC has long played a vital role in the local news ecosystem, but its role has changed over time and become less clear. In its next Charter, the BBC has an opportunity to become the cornerstone of the local news ecosystem, ensuring that everyone can benefit from truly local, high-quality journalism that's grounded in local communities, without depending on the BBC as the sole provider.

### Rationale

As local journalism has receded, people are less able to make sense of stories that are decontextualised from where they live. Trust in news is declining and more of us are avoiding the news than ever before. The BBC is not immune to the challenges facing the media. In the BBC's recent survey, 24% of respondents said the BBC no longer reflects their communities. Research shows that people trust local news that's produced locally far more than local news that's parachuted in from elsewhere.

There are a few key challenges to address in the next charter to transform the relationship between the BBC and local news. The BBC's Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) has created 165 journalism jobs to help report on local democracy. While the LDRS has filled gaps left by staff cutbacks in local journalism, some have raised concerns about its effect on the diversity of local news. In the most recent round of applications, 143 of the roles were employed by the three largest publishers of local news in the UK: Iconic, Newsquest and Reach plc, meaning that a majority of the BBC's £8m funding per year flows to these companies, cutting out the 300-400 independent local news providers across the country.

While the LDRs generally do a good job of reporting on council meetings, there are big gaps around the country in public interest reporting. The brief is only to report on the decision-making process, leaving a gap between the information and helping local people contextualise and make sense of local issues. The Service doesn't allow for deeper investigations that dig into local stories and hold our democratic institutions accountable. Local news providers are grounded in the communities they serve, facilitating meaningful community engagement, bringing

people together to provide shared experiences and social cohesion through making sense of the news. At a time when communities are more fractured than ever, there is a clear opportunity for the BBC to truly collaborate with local providers and put the community's information needs before other political or commercial interests.

## How it would work

We see three main elements to the BBC's partnership role, underpinned by a Partnership Agreement between the BBC and local news sector, supported by a training programme facilitating two-way learning between BBC professionals and colleagues across the sector, and overseen by a dedicated BBC Board Member:

- 1. An expanded Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS)** with clear aims to enhance the democratic accountability of local councils and other public services, to support the employment of reporters in the local news sector to cover not only local government but also other parts of the public sector such as health, education and justice. LDRs would produce content to be shared between the BBC and local news outlets, but the process for procuring local news partners would be open to a wider range of local news providers. Suppliers would be monitored against the commitments made in their applications.
- 2. A new Local News Commissioning Fund (LNCF)**, to support the production of original journalism in the public interest, including long-form, investigative and co-creational forms of journalism (where journalists work with communities to shape the news together). The LNCF should have the same size budget as the LDRS and would be available to all eligible local news partners, subject to a rigorous regional commissioning process, whereby either local news partners could approach the BBC with ideas, or the BBC could put out tenders on topics of interest. Projects should set out to meet democratic goals, such as investigating local issues, enhancing people's participation, providing solutions to problems, facilitating community cohesion and engaging under-engaged groups. The Fund should allow for publishers to work in partnership on complex or large-scale stories using whichever media work best for their communities, whether that's written or video content, an event or workshop, or even an interactive game.
- 3. A new BBC Platform for Local News**, sitting within each of the BBC's products but primarily visible in the BBC News product, a prominent, popular platform for BBC, Local Democracy Reporting Service and Local News Commissioning Fund content.

## Benefits

As misinformation and division continue to spread, the need for reliable, locally sourced information has never been greater. The need for change is clearly urgent, as both local journalism and the BBC face existential threats to their existence in the near future. The BBC helped build Britain's broadcasting infrastructure in the 20th century. In the 21st, by working together with local journalists in our communities, it can strengthen the foundations of local democracy. It's an opportunity to restore trust - both in journalism and in democracy. Some may argue that the status quo is acceptable, whereas others may wish to aim even higher, reframing the entire BBC mission around place-based, democratic, community sense-making and decentring national journalism entirely.

## Your views

- What is local news like in your area? Where do you go to find trustworthy local information?
- What would you like to see from local news providers in the future?
- What role should the BBC play in providing local news where you live?

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# Reframing the BBC as a public service media infrastructure institution

David Lee, University of Leeds

*The next BBC Charter should explicitly redefine the BBC not only as a broadcaster or content producer, but as a core public media infrastructure institution for the UK. Drawing on scholarship that understands public service media as democratic infrastructure, the BBC's Charter should formalise responsibilities beyond programme provision: strengthening regional production ecosystems, supporting equitable workforce development, and ensuring public-interest digital distribution. A new Public Purpose should commit the BBC to act as a long-term infrastructural anchor for democratic communication, regional creative economies, and fair access to media production and distribution.*

## Background

The BBC faces intense structural pressures: contested licence fee legitimacy, heightened political scrutiny, digital platform dominance, and audience fragmentation. Yet Charter debates often narrow to funding mechanisms or impartiality disputes. This obscures a more fundamental institutional question: what kind of organisation should the BBC be in a platform-dominated, globally concentrated media environment?

Public service broadcasting has historically been understood as a cultural and democratic institution, not simply a content supplier. More recent scholarship reframes public service media as part of democratic infrastructure — institutions that enable communicative equality and shared public life. In parallel, research on ‘media infrastructures’ highlights how communication systems depend on durable institutional and material arrangements, not only on programmes.

The BBC has long functioned as an infrastructural actor: building regional production centres, professional norms, technical standards and training pipelines. In the context of global streamers and platform intermediaries, this infrastructural role is increasingly significant but insufficiently recognised in the Charter framework.

## Rationale

First, the UK's screen production ecology remains uneven. While “out of London” quotas have redistributed some commissioning, research on cultural production demonstrates persistent geographic concentration, and informal recruitment practices that sustain structural barriers to entry. The BBC, as a publicly funded institution with scale and longevity, is uniquely positioned to invest in sustained regional capacity and transparent workforce pathways.

Second, creative labour markets are characterised by freelance precarity and unequal access. Across the sector, diversity and entry-level initiatives – including the BBC's own – have tended to be short-term and project-based, treated as discretionary rather than structurally embedded. Embedding a workforce development duty within the Charter would signal that fair access and training are not discretionary add-ons but central to public value.

Third, digital distribution is increasingly governed by global platform infrastructures. The BBC's online services operate within ecosystems shaped by commercial data extraction and algorithmic visibility. Public service media scholars have argued that universality and accessibility must be rethought in digital contexts. If the BBC is to remain universal in practice, it must be empowered to innovate in public-interest digital distribution and data governance. Current Charter language emphasises distinctiveness and universality but does not explicitly frame the BBC as responsible for sustaining the wider media ecosystem. This weakens accountability for its broader structural impact.

## How it would work

While the current Charter includes dispersed obligations relating to regional production, diversity and partnership working, these are not framed as an integrated infrastructural responsibility. The Royal Charter should introduce an additional Public Purpose:

To sustain and develop the United Kingdom's public media infrastructure by investing in regional production capacity, equitable workforce development, open and accessible digital distribution, and partnerships that strengthen democratic communication at local and national levels.

Implementation would involve:

- An Infrastructure and Ecosystem Duty, requiring annual reporting on regional investment, workforce access metrics, and long-term training outcomes.
- Ofcom oversight extended to assessment of ecosystem impact, including transparency in commissioning geography, employment practices and skills development.
- A ring-fenced proportion of expenditure dedicated to regional capacity building and structured entry-level pathways.
- A Digital Public Value Framework requiring transparency around data use, algorithmic curation, and accessibility standards in BBC online services.

Such measures would align the BBC's regulatory framework with its de facto role as a stabilising institution in a volatile media environment.

## Benefits

Success would mean a BBC whose legitimacy rests not only on its programmes, but on its visible role in sustaining democratic communication and creative opportunity across the UK. It would:

- Reinforce political independence by grounding the BBC's value in public infrastructure rather than market competition.
- Support regional development objectives.
- Address creative labour precarity through coordinated training and access pathways.
- Strengthen the UK's digital sovereignty in a platform-dominated environment.

Failure to embed this role risks gradual erosion: the BBC becoming primarily a content supplier competing in commercialised digital markets, with diminishing structural impact. Alternatives might focus purely on governance reform or funding models. While important, these risk treating symptoms rather than the institutional question of what the BBC is for.

## Your views

- Should the BBC's next Charter explicitly define it as a public media infrastructure institution, with responsibilities beyond content provision?
- What specific infrastructural roles (regional production, workforce development, digital innovation, local partnerships) should be prioritised?
- How should Ofcom measure and regulate the BBC's contribution to the wider media ecosystem?
- Should a fixed proportion of BBC spending be ring-fenced for long-term regional and workforce development investment?
- What risks might arise from expanding the BBC's formal responsibilities in this way?

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# Diversity of thought and representation at the BBC

## The Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity

*The legitimacy of the BBC being the national broadcaster must be based on its accurate representation of the people it serves – namely the UK population. If its duty is to be representative of the demographics of the UK, this needs to be transparently evident in its workforce at all levels of the corporation. This in turn will deliver Diversity of Thought, a range of perspectives, ideas, experiences, and problem-solving approaches, which will help the BBC stay relevant to audiences in terms of its output and modes of delivery.*

### Background

While the BBC has made progress in reaching diverse audiences over this Charter period, it risks erosion of legitimacy and public trust from under-represented groups due to a failure to reflect their authentic lives. The Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity has published reports on media portrayal, diversity of senior leadership, Creative Diversity Commitments, disability, neurodivergence and regional representation at the BBC. Our work with academics, journalists, filmmakers and the UK's independent media production sector, sets out practical recommendations for embedding diversity, to ensure the BBC is accessible and truly representative of every part of the UK.

Current BBC targets for workforce diversity were set out in its 2020 Creative Diversity Report as '50:20:12' for 50% gender, 20% ethnic and 12% disability. While current staff numbers published in the BBC 2025 Equality Report indicate these targets are being met, there are gaps with retention and progression of diverse leaders, an issue highlighted by Ofcom.

### Rationale

Interviews with media workers and in the academic space show that diversity within a workforce is integral to producing diverse output and authentic portrayal. Structural issues play an integral role in this process and are often overlooked in pursuit of targets that do not address non-inclusive cultures. Lessons from the BBC's move to MediaCity in Salford show that investment into locally based skills and training was critical for delivery of genuine regional representation and not capital investment or staff relocation. Apprenticeships, local college partnerships, and BBC/industry skills programmes which significantly expand the regional talent pool with development pipelines and regional editorial authority are key. Without structural reform, diversity targets risk becoming performative rather than transformative, and the BBC's legitimacy among diverse audiences continues to weaken.

### How it would work

The Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity is making the following recommendations to drive change:

**Transparency of data** – Mandatory, transparent, and disaggregated diversity reporting is required. Collated results across multiple workforces mask the true picture of areas where diversity has remained poor over many decades. Disaggregated data is essential for accountability, targeted intervention, and meaningful progress. Therefore, we recommend diversity data breakdowns of:

- Leaders/staff by nations and regions, including larger programme teams (to avoid individual identification) with specificity of divisions and teams included in diversity data.
- Independent suppliers – executive teams and staffing on commissions.
- Commissioning spending by nation/region/out-of-London production hours vs. spend.

- Freelance workforce data, and the extent of reliance on freelance labour in editorially significant roles.

**Creative Diversity Commitment** – Investment must be ring-fenced for new commissions from diverse-led production companies or those featuring diverse portrayal and talent. There should be:

- Diverse commissioning funds for each diversity characteristic separately.
- Training and progression support to the independent sub-sector.
- Business support for diverse-led independent producers.
- Promotion and marketing support provided by the BBC for diverse commissions.

**Geographic Diversity** – De-centralised commissioning is recommended for locally empowered regional newsrooms with commissioning autonomy and genre-specific regional commissioning (news, factual, drama, arts & culture). We propose:

- Senior commissioning roles should be based in the nations and regions, with devolved budgets and decision-making authority.
- Regional portrayal targets should be linked to both spend and genre, ensuring that high-value genres (e.g., drama) are not disproportionately London-centric.

**Disability and Neurodivergence** – Attitudes toward disabled workers and lack of employer understanding about their legal obligations are the most common barriers to disabled industry professionals staying and advancing in UK broadcast roles. Recommendations include up-to-date training on equality law for all managers, giving disabled people access to mentors, including other disabled people working in the industry, in addition to widening recruitment practices. We recommend:

- Mandatory accessibility audits of BBC workplaces and production environments.
- Guaranteed reasonable-adjustment pathways with transparent timelines and accountability.
- Commissioning incentives for productions that employ disabled talent in senior creative roles.

**A new Board-level role** – We are proposing a new senior role that would take responsibility for driving Diversity of Thought at the BBC. They would report directly to the Director-General and be in a board level role with the analytical, operational and HR levers needed to drive real change.

## Benefits

On the basis of the above recommendations, we envisage we would see people running BBC programmes who come from all kinds of backgrounds, with News decisions informed by people who really understand the different communities which comprise the UK population. Creative talent from everywhere would see the BBC as somewhere they can genuinely rise to the top. Audiences would feel the BBC is for them because they would see it in who makes the programmes and how they are made, so the licence fee would feel more legitimate.

## Your views

1. Should the BBC be required to make sure its workforce reflects the diversity of the UK population?
2. How important is it to you that BBC staff in your local area reflect the community where you live?
3. How much confidence do you have that the people running the BBC come from a wide range of backgrounds? What would increase your confidence?
4. If the BBC published detailed information about the backgrounds of its staff, at all levels and in all regions, would that affect your trust in the organisation? What would you most want to know?
5. If the BBC tries hard but fails to become more representative, should there be any consequences? What seems fair to you?

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# Improving diverse representation on popular television broadcasts: *Strictly Come Dancing* as a case study

Karen Wood and Kathryn Stamp, Coventry University

*Being represented on TV is extremely important to people from disabled, LGBTQ+ and marginalised communities and resulting public perceptions of this representation are significant. To develop the legacy and the future possibilities of the BBC's commitment to inclusivity, accessible and inclusive practices need to be strengthened and expanded. This proposal is grounded in an AHRC-funded public engagement project and research that used Strictly Come Dancing as a case study and the results are applicable to other programmes.*

## Background

The 2021 Census recorded 1.5 million people over the age of 16 in the UK as identifying with an LGB+<sup>1</sup> identity around 3.2% of the total population which is no insignificant number. The census also reported that 19.3% of the population identified as disabled, which amounts to around 9.8 million people within the UK. Thus, the need for the normalisation and acceptance of public depictions of disability and same-sex relationships is imperative. For the BBC, shows like the popular dance entertainment show *Strictly Come Dancing* has been both hailed and criticised for its efforts to promote and incorporate inclusive casting practices within recent years. It has made headlines for its inclusion of same-sex dance partnerships and disabled people in formalised dance routines. Whilst there is great praise for the representation offered by the show in popular media and in the work of some academics, others question the presentation of these contestants and suggest that the show does not go far enough in representing the communities as it could.

*Strictly* has a unique position to do this as a show centred around partner dancing. Nonetheless the show has received some criticism for its representation of same-sex partnerships as 'decentring gay love and sex' by working to emphasise friendship between them where they normally emphasise 'chemistry' in heterosexual partners. They suggest that this is done as part of an attempt to make the coupling something that the public deems acceptable, which emerged as a point of discussion in our research in the depictions of disability on the show too. Diluting representations of marginalised communities to be deemed acceptable for the public needs attention and careful consideration with the relevant communities involved.

## Rationale

Discussed as issues for both disabled and LGBT+ peoples is the pressure associated with representation. A burden of representing a community can become an additional challenge for people to face during filming. One such example can be shared from our *Strictly* research where issues were raised with the narrative of disability being presented as something that could be overcome. This is unfortunately easily replicated through the nature of a reality television competition wherein disabled contestants often find themselves being given the narrative of needing to overcome their disability to compete in the competition against non-disabled opponents.

We collected research material using multi-modal methods working with 35+ co-creators and ethical approval from Coventry University was obtained.

## How it would work

1. Implement accessible and inclusive practices in commissioning and programming and the digital dissemination platforms that are long-lasting and consistent e.g., live British Sign Language interpretation on live shows.
2. Build relationships with communities who hold the situated knowledge and have lived experience of the programme content and ensure that any work is financially compensated.
3. Be open and transparent about the criteria for programming with communities and the learning that takes place as part of these collaborations, to educate audiences about inclusion and access.
4. Demonstrate a continued willingness to effect change through the example set, fostering public perception change, challenging dominant norms and narratives and diversifying leadership.

## Benefits

*Strictly*'s work in inclusivity and representation is often referenced as an example of good practice, sometimes at the forefront of change, and its progression is commendable. Due to this, it is important to consider what a longer-term commitment to inclusivity and representation of dance on popular television shows, other live shows and general programming could do to develop public understanding and experience of disability, gender and difference. This is not only concerning inclusivity on the TV but also how the activity is communicated and shared with audiences, increasing and expanding forms of access.

Some of the participants in our research expressed a desire to participate in dance activity, which was triggered by viewing *Strictly* content and getting excited by seeing people they identified with being represented. Considering ways to increase public participation in dance by harnessing the popularity of *Strictly* could have positive implications for public health, social cohesion and individual development.

## Your views

- Should access and inclusion be considered for all live TV programmes, so that practices such as BSL can be available?
- How are marginalised communities represented on TV involved in commissioning and producing? How could this be improved?
- What casting welfare practices should be incorporated on set for those representing marginalised communities?

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Varying outputs such as evaluation films, dance films and stop motion gifs have resulted from this research and can be found online at <https://canvas-story.bbcrewind.co.uk/strictly/>

# Centering neurodivergent voices in BBC programming

Marco Scalvini

*The UK television industry has made welcome progress in how it portrays neurodivergent people, but the BBC must lead the way in making this the standard, not the exception. The next Royal Charter should require the BBC to implement inclusive commissioning practices. By building collaborative relationships with neurodivergent communities, the BBC can ensure these voices are central to the stories told about them, moving beyond stereotypes to enrich the viewing experience for everyone.*

## Background

We are slowly moving away from the days when neurodivergent characters were solely defined by their conditions. However, to maintain its legitimacy as the national broadcaster, the BBC must build on this progress. Being represented on TV is incredibly important to marginalized communities. For neurodivergent individuals, seeing normalized, everyday depictions of their experiences is vital to feeling like they belong in the national conversation.

## Rationale

Currently, marginalized creators often face the burden of representing an entire community. In drama and entertainment, there is still a lingering risk of neurodivergent narratives being presented as something that needs to be 'overcome'; or falling back on tired tropes like the emotionless genius.

There are strong examples outside the BBC of what getting it right looks like. Netflix's *Heartbreak High* successfully features an autistic character whose neurodivergence is just one part of a fully realized life. Furthermore, structural guidelines like Channel 4's *Disability Code of Portrayal* set a strong benchmark by requiring that neurodivergent people are shown as well-rounded characters with agency. The BBC should adopt these community-led approaches as a baseline.

## How it would work

The new Royal Charter and Framework Agreement should encourage the BBC to adopt the following practices:

- Build direct relationships with the communities who actually live these experiences, ensuring they are financially compensated for their creative input.
- Prioritize casting neurodivergent actors in neurodivergent roles, while also casting them in everyday roles where their condition is not the focus of the plot.
- Implement simple, effective welfare practices to support neurodivergent participants on set, ensuring the production environment is accessible to all.
- Be open with the public about how the BBC is learning to collaborate with these communities, helping to educate audiences about inclusion.

## Benefits

The primary advantage is that audiences would feel a genuine connection to the BBC because they would see reflections of their own lives on screen. This drives the normalization and acceptance of neurodivergence in

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everyday society. The alternative is falling behind other broadcasters who are already taking these necessary steps, resulting in surface-level representation that alienates modern audiences.

### Your views

- How can the BBC better include neurodivergent communities in the creation and development of its programs?
- Do you feel current TV shows accurately reflect neurodivergent experiences without relying on stereotypes?
- What practices should be incorporated on set to ensure neurodivergent creators can thrive?
- Should specific funding be set aside for shows centered on empowering neurodivergent stories?

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# A guarantor of cultural diversity and citizens' cultural rights: strengthening the BBC's constitution

## UK Coalition for Cultural Diversity

*The BBC's current remit accords with the UK's international obligations on sustaining diversity of cultural expressions and our cultural rights according to The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The UN Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2002 and UNESCO's Convention, 2005. As the oldest and most internationally revered public service organisation, this remit must be defended and strengthened in the context of the changed broadcasting environment.*

### Background

The recent Media Bill effectively opens up public service broadcasting to commercial players and makes limited demands to ensure the diversity of cultural expression, or means to monitor the delivery of their proposed public service content. To remain a cornerstone for the production and distribution of the diversity of cultural expressions through public service broadcasting, the BBC requires **adequate resources and a strong independent framework for governance.**

### Rationale

The BBC, the oldest public service organisation, has taken pioneering initiatives to promote diversity in the corporation's employment, output, audiences, strategy and business planning, with the goal of becoming a true reflection of the nations and regions it serves. In this it **promotes equal citizenship, democracy and serves the different nations and communities that make up the UK.**

At a time of the enormous fragmentation of media and domination of online media by non-British players, (in some cases 20 times the size of the BBC), the BBC facilitates a common conversation between all citizens and the UK's diverse communities thus **strengthening social cohesion and mutual understanding.**

Successive OFCOM assessments of investment in local independent production reveal that the BBC contributes by far the most both in relation to other public service broadcasters and commercial players, whose investment is negligible in comparison .

The BBC also leads in the provision of original material for children, including in forms beyond animation, as a producer and co-producer of local independent low-to-mid-budget film production, and in providing high quality coverage of British artists and their work.

As such the BBC's investment in original programming, with no necessary commercial considerations, remains the bedrock of investment in the whole of our UK audio-visual industry and a guarantee of local-interest commissions and programming. This is in spite of inadequate funding aggravated by cuts imposed by successive conservative administrations.

### How it would work

UNESCO's Convention 2005 expressly allows states to put in place the measures necessary to ensure inclusivity and diversity of cultural expressions, including through public service broadcasting.

The BBC should be underpinned by a Permanent Royal Charter establishing the BBC in perpetuity and enshrining its independence. This would prevent unnecessary political interference in its future.

The BBC's funding should be progressive and ensure the resources necessary for the BBC to continue providing the range of local programming and services.

In line with other countries like Germany and Norway, consideration must be given to replacing the licence fee with a progressive Household Levy.

The funding system for the BBC should also be independent from any political interference from the government of the day. This can be done by transferring the oversight of the BBC remit and the financial resources needed to deliver this to an independent organisation established with a specific mission. This would not only set out the financial needs of the BBC, but also act to regulate, on an annual basis, to ensure that public money is being invested in the right areas.

New structures, such as citizens' assemblies, should be set up to monitor and guarantee the involvement and representation of the people whom the BBC serves.

## **Benefits**

A strengthened BBC would maximise its potential to be a pan-European actor, and to provide and benefit from cross-border provision of public service audio-visual programmes and services. Non-European SVOD services are increasing across the continent, and the BBC could develop its own Pan-European SVOD platform to carry BBC material and that of other channels and creators.

A strengthened BBC will counter the disinformation destabilising our democracies. This must be a core public purpose in its permanent charter.

A stronger BBC would safeguard the role played in developing skills and talent to service all our creative industries, which is particularly vital for women and creators from poorer backgrounds. Commercial players have not even honoured a voluntary commitment to invest 1% of net profits in training.

## **Your views**

- Do you consider the BBC to be a broadcaster independent of government control and do you think its independence needs to be safeguarded?
- Beyond news and drama, what programming is most important to you that the BBC currently provides?
- Do you feel that the range of UK's experience across its nations and regions would be represented were the BBC's status in the broadcasting environment to diminish?
- What role do you think the BBC should play in safeguarding 'truth' in today's media environment?

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