



# Voice of the Listener & Viewer

Working for Quality and Diversity in Broadcasting Autumn 2010 Bulletin Issue 102

## TIME FOR THE LICENCE-PAYER'S VOICE TO BE HEARD Exposing Decisions to Public Scrutiny

**October has been one of the most momentous months** in the eighty four year history of the BBC – the licence-payer funded BBC. The momentous nature of events has been equalled only by the manner of their suddenness and secrecy: licence payers excluded from choices about how their money is spent: decisions behind closed doors, despite the promises of 'the big society'.

**So starting now and over the coming months** Voice of the Listener & Viewer (VLV) will be holding a series of events to inform licence-payers and the public at large about the proposed changes and their implications. A chance to explain will be afforded to key players – broadcasting chiefs in the BBC and beyond, government ministers, politicians of all parties, and the regulators. VLV members will have a chance to question the decision-makers, face-to-face. Our aim will be explanation and understanding, dialogue and inclusiveness – avoiding partisanship and defensiveness, dogma and over-simplification.

VLV is especially conscious of its heavy responsibility in representing the citizen interest following the merger of the Ofcom Communications Consumer Panel and Consumer Focus into the Citizens' Advice Bureaux. We are determined not to fail licence-payers and the public at large.

### VLV's Main Areas of Concern

#### The BBC's New Burdens and Responsibilities

**Last week the BBC was informed about, or agreed to, decisions involving :-**

A freezing of the licence fee till 2017 – a 16% reduction over the 6 - year period – with no allowance for inflation.

Taking over (from 2014) funding of the BBC World Service – that's £260m a year currently paid by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Taking over (from 2013) funding of BBC Monitoring – exact cost unknown.

Taking over (from 2015) the funding of S4C (Wales' only non-BBC supplier of Welsh language TV programming) – £100m + annually.

Funding (from 2013) super fast broadband in rural areas - £150m annually, in addition to the BBC's existing commitment to facilitate the switch-over to digital TV and Radio transmission.

Helping to fund government plans for new local TV services - £25m capital cost in 2013/4 and then £5m annually.

*Continued on page 3*

**'Broadcasting:  
where are we going? More  
questions than answers'**

**Wednesday, 24 November**

10.15am - 3.30pm -

*Geological Society, Burlington House, London W1*

Speakers include:

**Lord Burns**, Chair, Channel 4  
**Patrick Barwise**, Professor Emeritus  
Management & Marketing, London  
Business School

**Richard Klein**, Controller, BBC 4, with  
**Roger Bolton**, Independent Producer &  
Presenter, *Feedback*, Radio 4, chairing

Lord Burns and Richard Klein will outline their visions for the future of their channels. Professor Barwise will deal with some confusions about non-linear Television.



*Lord Burns*

The speakers and participants will also consider some of the implications of the recent decisions to cut BBC funding and introduce changes in the powers and scope of Ofcom, the independent media regulator set up under the 2003 Communications Act.



*Richard Klein*

The conference starts at 10.30am and ends with tea at 3.30pm prior to VLV's AGM at 4pm.



*Paddy Barwise*

**Jon Snow**, Channel 4 News, will present the prizes to the winners of VLV's 2010 Student Essay Competition at 1.45pm.

#### **Secretary of State, Jeremy Hunt MP**

The Culture Secretary was unexpectedly sent abroad at short notice by the Prime Minister on 25 October. He was therefore unable to fulfil his engagement with VLV members on 26 October.

Mr Hunt has promised to arrange a new date in the near future. We are in the process of seeking a mutually convenient time and will keep you informed.

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## Voice of the Listener & Viewer

Working for Quality and Diversity in British Broadcasting

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(registered, charity 296207)  
which supports some of VLV's educational work.

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Sue Washbrook: Membership/ Board & Trust Administrator.

Voice of the Listener & Viewer (VLV) represents the citizen and consumer interests in broadcasting and works for quality and diversity in British broadcasting. VLV is free from political, sectarian and commercial affiliations. VLV is concerned with the issues, structures, institutions and regulation that underpin the British broadcasting system and in particular to maintain the principles of public service broadcasting.

VLV does not handle complaints.

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## From the President



We delayed publication of this Bulletin until after the Comprehensive Spending Review in order to bring you the latest news. As you will see we are deeply concerned at the nature of the decisions and at the manner in which they were taken without any public consultation or Parliamentary debate.

It was therefore most disappointing that the Secretary of State could not speak to VLV members on 26 October but we hope we shall soon have a new date when you can express your views to him.

VLV and I have been working for the past 27 years to provide an open forum and collective voice for listeners, viewers and licence fee payers so as to ensure transparency in decisions about the future of British broadcasting – one of the most powerful influences on our culture and democracy. Because of VLV, far greater respect is now given to the views of licence fee payers, and public consultation before major change is now the norm. *But this sudden announcement and the manner of the latest BBC settlement, coupled with the changes to the remit and powers of Ofcom, have destroyed these gains at a stroke.*

This is not right: the BBC is not just another Government department. VLV helped to ensure that safeguards were specially built in to the 2003 Communications Act to ensure Ofcom's independence. We must not allow these latest changes to affect the editorial integrity of news and programme makers or the quality of the content they produce. VLV will therefore launch a series of events over the coming months to inform the public and provide a collective voice through which licence fee payers can channel their views and lobby those responsible.

I hope I shall have the pleasure of meeting you at some of them.

## In Memoriam

It is with great sadness that we report the death in August of **Lord McIntosh of Haringey PC**. Andrew McIntosh was the husband of former VLV Board member and Voice of the Listener Trustee, Naomi Sargent, who died in 2008. He had a distinguished career as a Labour Party politician both on the Greater London Council and subsequently in the House of Lords. In recent years Lord McIntosh took an active interest in European affairs but will be best remembered by VLV members as a wise friend and staunch supporter of Naomi's work on behalf of consumers and citizens and to increase media literacy and participation, especially among the elderly or excluded.



In the previous Bulletin we reported the death of VLV member, **Margaret Fenton**. We would now like to record the generous bequest that Margaret left to the Voice of the Listener Trust. It will enable us to step up our campaigning on behalf of listeners, viewers and licence fee payers at this time of rapid change.

## The 10<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of Voice of the Listener & Viewer Ltd will be held at 4pm on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2010 at

*The Geological Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1.*

Nominations and resolutions should be sent to the Company Secretary at PO Box 401, Gravesend, DA12 9FY, no fewer than three and not more than 21 days before the AGM.

## TIME FOR THE LICENCE-PAYER'S VOICE TO BE HEARD (continued from page 1)

Taking into account those new spending commitments and the effect of a six year freeze on the licence fee, it seems the BBC could be faced with an eventual £600 million additional annual burden.

**So on behalf of VLV members we want to know:**

*What will be cut – over and above the limited proposals agreed in the Spring 2010 BBC Strategy Review? Will the approach be 'salami slicing', eliminating some areas of programming or the loss of whole channels?*

*How will licence-payers be consulted? How will we hear and feel the decisions about the spending of our money?*

*Will the World Service and Monitoring Service funding be ring-fenced? Will there be precautions against 'seepage' between these funds and the BBC's domestic radio and television services? What role will the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Defence or any other government department play in determining BBC spending priorities?*

*What's actually involved in rolling out super fast broadband in rural areas, (in addition to facilitating digital TV and Radio switch-over) and in the support government wants from the BBC for new local TV services?*

### The Regulatory Framework: How are things with Ofcom?

**The extra burdens on the BBC coincide with a significant lightening of regulation and loosening of controls on commercial broadcasters.**

**Statements from Ofcom** suggest the media regulator is taking its foot off the regulatory pedal – in response to government actions and attitudes, actual or anticipated. Several key safeguards built into the remit of the independent regulator are now to be assumed by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport. They include the monitoring of changes in media ownership and control.

**BSkyB** on current profit trends could by 2015 be earning more than £6 billion annually - **twice the BBC's projected licence fee income**. So BSkyB – already so strongly entrenched, with its press parent News International - could become **the** UK media superpower.

**VLV, in the interests of pluralism and empowered citizenship**, is against monopolies of any kind. We believe in a diverse and innovative media economy, resourced through a mix of commercial and public funds.

But a balanced mix – in a framework reflecting social responsibility as well as market forces – is crucial. **Media content is more than a commodity, it is one of the most powerful influences on our culture and democracy**

**So on behalf of VLV members we ask:**

*How and when will changes be made to the 2003 Communications Act to validate some of these decisions? Will they be debated in Parliament?*

*Will the content quality guarantees of the 2003 Communications Act be preserved?*

*To what extent will existing Ofcom principles and processes be subject to Ministerial interventions, and with what arguments?*

*Will Ofcom's supervisory and enforcement powers be diluted in areas which affect the public as citizens rather than as consumers? Which exact powers now exercised by Ofcom will the Secretary of State reserve to him or herself? How will this affect the democratic process?*

*Will Ofcom still have the resources and political backing to persist with initiatives in key fields like media literacy and support for groups with special needs?*

These and other issues will be addressed by VLV over the coming months, and at its conference in London on Wednesday, 24 November.

### **BBC Trust launches consultation into BBC Radio in the Nations**

The BBC Trust is consulting on BBC Radio in the Nations - Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. It includes the Welsh and Gaelic language services. It closes on 12 January 2011. The review will assess the performance of each service against the criteria set out in its Service Licence and future strategy. Details on the BBC Trust Website or from the Trust, 180 Great Portland Street, London W1W 5QZ. We urge our readers in the Nations to respond and copy their responses to VLV.

### **S4C fights decision for merger with the BBC**

S4C is to launch a Judicial Review of the Government's decision to effectively merge S4C with the BBC. S4C says it had no knowledge of recent decisions which will give the BBC effective control over the finances and operations of the Welsh language TV channel.

Chair of S4C, John Walter Jones said, "The effect of the cuts agreed between Secretary of State, and the BBC will have a disastrous effect for viewers across Wales. *Continue on page 5*

## **Children at the Heart of the BBC's Mission**

**Monday, 1 November, 6 – 8pm**

*One Whitehall Place, London SW1*

**Joe Godwin, Director of BBC Children's Programmes**, is the speaker at this

VLV seminar.

**Professor Jeanette Steemers, University of Westminster**, will be in the chair.

**Professor Maire Messenger Davies, University of Ulster**, and **Anna Home**,

**Chair, Save Kids' TV**, will lead the questions.



*Joe Godwin*

Children's television in Britain is in crisis - the UK market is the most competitive in the world for young viewers with some 30 channels targeting young British eyes. But just one in a hundred programmes offered is now an original, first-run UK production, and only the BBC is producing any volume of original children's programming. Joe Godwin is the person with that responsibility. How will he cope with the latest cuts to BBC funding and the imminent move of his department to Salford? Don't miss this opportunity to ask him.

## **Broadcasting in Scotland and Wales : the Future**

**Friday 5 November** 1.30pm – 6pm

*VLV's 19th Annual Scottish Conference in association with  
Edinburgh Napier and Stirling Universities*

*at the Netherbow Theatre, 45 High Street, Edinburgh*

Speakers include:

**John Walter Jones**, Chair S4C,  
the Welsh language TV Channel

**Bobby Hain**, Managing Director, Broadcasting &  
Regulatory Affairs Scottish Television

**Donald Campbell**, Chief Executive, MG Alba,  
The Gaelic Channel

**Ian Small**, Head of Public Policy, BBC Scotland

**Blair Jenkins**, Chair Scottish Digital Network Panel

**Julie Craik**, Fife Screen & Tay Screen, Scotland

Gordon Ramsay, Cardiff Four Nations follow up report

This year's VLV Scottish Conference considers the state of broadcasting in Scotland and Wales. What kinds of content and policies are needed to enable high quality successful programmes and services? How should small nations achieve success in their media industries? What does the future hold for broadcasting in Gaelic and in Welsh? What are the future plans of BBC Scotland, of STV and S4C? How will we negotiate the current economic challenges? Do the policies of the Governments and Parliaments in Edinburgh and London help or hinder? What forms of public/private partnerships are being evolved and with what benefits or disadvantages? What is best for viewers and listeners in and across the two nations?

Come and take part in an important debate.

## **Broadcasting Futures: Challenges and Opportunities**



*Christopher Hall*

Was the theme for the event VLV held during Sheffield's Literary Festival *Off the Shelf* on Saturday, 16 October.

**Christopher Hall**, Film maker and Senior Lecturer, Film and TV, University of Sheffield; **Sylvia Harvey**, Visiting Professor at Leeds University; and **Professor Emeritus Bob Usherwood**, VLV Board Member explained the current state of British broadcasting and what was at risk in such a rapidly changing world. **VLV President, Jocelyn Hay** chaired.

The lively and varied audience included VLV members from Leeds, Derby, Cheshire and Sheffield. The event was so successful we hope it will provide a template for similar events around the country in the coming year.

We are most grateful to VLV Board members Bob Usherwood and David Eggington for organizing the event, and to the Sheffield Festival organisers for their support.

### **Digital Radio Issues**

Many thanks to the members who contacted us over the summer about plans for radio and the potential switch from FM to Digital Transmission. We are sorry we were unable to respond but they were important in formulating VLV's position on digital radio.

#### **VLV Position on Digital Radio**

VLV has supported digital radio for over a decade with regular presentations at our conferences. We continue to support the switch to digital transmission and suggest that people consider buying a dual analogue/digital receiver when purchasing new equipment. The advantages for the consumer at this time are not as significant as for digital television. The present FM analogue transmission has served most UK consumers well. When digital radio becomes as compelling a consumer proposition as digital TV, switchover can take place. An imposed switch risks putting at risk a trusted medium vital to many vulnerable, isolated fellow citizens.

#### **Digital Radio Report Published**

VLV made a significant contribution to the report *Digital Radio – What is in it for Consumers?* Prepared by the Ministerial Consumer Expert Advisory Group of which VLV is a member. The report was published on 14 September and recommends that any switch to digital radio must not happen before listeners are ready for it or until the industry has delivered what consumers need. The full 60 page report is on the VLV website.

#### **VLV will continue to ensure the voice of the consumer is heard**

The government has drawn up an action plan to decide whether to proceed with a switch to digital radio. VLV will be active on several specialist committees and will monitor all aspects of any proposals.

## Letters to the Editor

Letters do not necessarily represent the views of the Association and may be shortened for publication

I read in the press that Ofcom is ready to drop some of its powers over the media, and I would hope that VLV will carefully scrutinise what these are to try to ensure that standards on TV are not further reduced.

It has been suggested for some time that 'society' may decide that less formal regulation is needed to protect audiences, as technology is enabling people to exert greater control over the content they view. But it is also clear that there are many loopholes that would be better filled by stricter regulation. Messages of public benefit may also be less likely to be taken forward by organisations driven by a profit motive.

Last year VLV was part of a coalition to support public service broadcasting - it sought to ensure that the voices of civil society groups and citizens are heard in debate. Is it still being pursued?

**T B C Clark, Harrogate, N Yorks**

*Editor's note: Mr Clark echoes VLV concerns. The Coalition he refers to was a VLV initiative which has now merged with VLV so that we can pool our resources to greater effect in the common cause.*

I returned from the UK at the end of August and feel that it is more important than ever to retain and support the high reputation of British broadcasting in these changing and rather disturbing times. Keep up the good work. I hope to see you at a VLV conference or meeting when I return to London next February.

**Barbara D'Arcy, San Francisco**

I rely on radio (Radio 4 mostly) and television to a small extent, but find that the quality of programmes has declined and that the presenters no longer speak clearly and too quickly for elderly hearing. Not to mention background music. We hope that you can help the elderly and handicapped. We wish you well.

**T Barton, Chislehurst**

*Editor's note: VLV is engaged in a major project to help solve this problem. We had hoped to be able to publish initial results by now but these are not ready yet. More news in the January Bulletin.*

I enjoyed membership of VLV for the programme of visits which enabled me to put my queries to the managers of various organisations. You seem to have discontinued such visits so I am discontinuing my membership.

**B C Edwards, Middlesex**

*Editor's note: Mr Edwards must have missed the more than a dozen visits we organised this year, including the BBC Natural History Unit in Bristol, ITV News in Birmingham and Broadcasting House, London. Many were over-subscribed. We will publish a new series of visits in the January Bulletin*

### Letters to the Editor

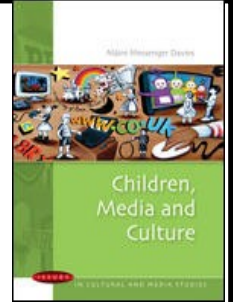
Letters do not necessarily represent the views of the Association and may be shortened for publication.

**Deadline for next issue:  
3rd January 2011**

Write, fax or e-mail your letters to the Editor at:  
info@vlv.org.uk

## Book Reviews

**Children, Media and Culture** by **Maire Messenger Davies**, Professor of Media Studies and Director of the Centre for Media Research at the University of Ulster, Northern Ireland. Published in paperback by Open University Press, McGraw-Hill Education. ISBN NO 97803352292908. Price £19.99



Essential reading for media students, this book addresses the continuing concerns around media 'effects' and critically examines the view that technology has dramatically changed children's lives. It seeks to broaden public debate about the role of popular media in children's lives and considers how public anxieties regarding the harmful influences of the media are heightened at times of rapid technological change, past and present.

You may not be aware that the BBC does not intend to broadcast the Royal Institute's Christmas lectures on radio this year, only on television. Surely it is no problem to broadcast the lectures on Radio 4.

The number of blind in our society now numbers over 300. Yet we are all licence fee payers, are we not?

**D V Wilson, Edinburgh**

### S4C fights decision for merger with the BBC

*(continued from page 3)*

"I am astounded at the contempt that the London government has shown not just towards S4C, but also towards the Welsh people... This is no way to conduct public affairs and ... an affront to the good conduct of public policy and the democratic process.

The S4C Authority is unanimous in its desire to seek a Judicial Review of Jeremy Hunt's decision and the way it was taken, behind closed doors without any kind of consultation with S4C".

John Walter Jones is one of the speakers at VLV's conference *Broadcasting in Scotland and Wales: the Future* in Edinburgh on 5 November.

*See page 4.*

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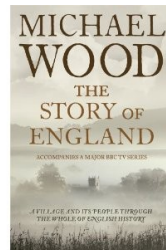
## Autumn Competition

Michael Wood's *The Story of England* was one of the BBC's most popular recent documentary series in which villagers traced their history back to Roman times. You could win a copy of the book by answering the following question:

**"In which English county is the village of Kibworth situated"?**

Replies on a postcard to: Autumn Competition, VLV. PO Box 401, Gravesend, Kent DA12 9FY. Or by email to: [info@vlv.org.uk](mailto:info@vlv.org.uk) by 2 December 2010. The Editor's decision is final.

The winner of the Summer Competition was Anthony Wills, London NW3.



*The Story of England* by Michael Wood published by Viking Adult  
 H/b: £20.00  
 Ref: 9780670919031

## Diary Dates

**Friday, 5 November** 1pm - 6pm  
 VLV's 18th annual Scottish conference  
**'Broadcasting in Scotland and Wales: The Future'**  
 Netherbow Theatre, Edinburgh

**Thursday, 11 November** 11.30am  
 Visit to **BBC Training Academy**, London W12 (fully booked)

**Wednesday, 24 November** 10.15am—3.30pm  
**VLV's 27<sup>th</sup> annual Autumn Conference**  
 The Geological Society, Piccadilly, London W1

**Wednesday, 24 November** 1.45pm  
**Presentation of Prizes for VLV's 2010 Student Essay Competition**  
 The Geological Society, Piccadilly, London W1

**Wednesday, 24 November** 4pm  
**VLV Ltd AGM**  
 The Geological Society, Piccadilly, London W1

**Wednesday, 1 December** 2.30pm  
 Visit to **BBC Broadcasting House & TV Licensing**, London W1 (fully booked)

**Sunday, 3 April 2011** 2.30pm  
 Concert by the **BBC Elstree Concert Band** in aid of The Voice of the Listener Trust by kind permission of the BBC at the Maida Vale Studio, London W9, in celebration of its 50th Anniversary

**Tuesday, 12 April** 10.15am — 4.30pm  
**VLV's 28th Annual Spring Conference**  
 The Geological Society, Piccadilly, London W1

**For tickets and enquiries please contact: Linda Forbes**  
**Tel: 01474 338711**  
**Email: [linda.forbes@vlv.org.uk](mailto:linda.forbes@vlv.org.uk) or visit [www.vlv.org.uk](http://www.vlv.org.uk)**



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