



# Voice of the Listener & Viewer

Championing Excellence and Diversity in Broadcasting

Autumn 2021

Bulletin 132

## BBC FUNDING SETTLEMENT

As we go to press there is still no news of the BBC funding settlement for April 2022. It was due to be announced in the summer but has been delayed repeatedly, most recently by the Cabinet reshuffle. Perhaps by the time you read this, there will be news, which makes writing this column quite challenging.

Even if the future is uncertain for the BBC, there are some facts we can be sure of.

Since 2010 **public funding** for the BBC has dropped by 25% in real terms as TV Licence income has been diverted to other causes - not BBC services aimed at UK audiences. These include the World Service (formerly funded by the Foreign Office), broadband rollout and, most recently, the cost of free TV licences for the over 75's, a policy introduced and previously paid for by the DWP.

**Inflation in production costs** has risen steadily. In recent years. While it's difficult to establish the exact figure because costs are commercially sensitive, it's estimated that average inflation is at least 5% but for drama this rises to 35%. Costs have been further inflated by 10%-25% because of new processes to protect staff from Covid.

According to Enders Analysis the BBC will need a settlement which rises in line with inflation, plus an annual increase of 2.0% to maintain its existing level of funding. If the settlement isn't adequate the BBC will have to cut services and probably halt the rollout of its current strategy, which includes moving more staff to the Nations and Regions.

Some might say that the BBC should bring in more commercial income to plug the gap. Tim Davie would be very well placed to achieve this, as former CEO of BBC Worldwide where he successfully oversaw international commercial deals and ran BBC Studios. The problem with this approach is that to attract international sales content has to appeal to audiences outside the UK. There are clearly some programmes, such as those from the Natural History Unit and some drama, which have international appeal, but VLV doesn't want this to be the driving force behind commissioning decisions. The driving force should be content which is relevant to and resonates with audiences in the UK.

VLV hopes that the funding settlement will ensure that BBC services can be preserved. If not, this could alienate audiences at a time when the BBC needs all the public support it can get in the face of proposals to make it a subscription service.

## VLV AUTUMN CONFERENCE 24th November 2021



VLV's annual Autumn Conference will be held online on the morning of Wednesday 24th November at 10.30am. We are delighted that **Richard Sharp**, Chairman of the BBC, and **Maggie Carver**, interim Chair of Ofcom, will be our keynote speakers. We also plan to have a panel discussion about **listed events** regulation which determines the sporting events which have to be available to view free of charge.

The conference takes place at a time of considerable uncertainty for broadcasters. BBC funding for the next five years is not in place yet, the potential privatization of Channel 4 is still on the cards and a Media White Paper is anticipated later this year which we hope will provide better support for the public service broadcasting system.

To find out more and book for the event go to <https://www.vlv.org.uk/upcoming-events/> or contact the VLV office.

## NOMINATIONS FOR THE VLV AWARDS 2021

We hope we will be able to celebrate the VLV awards for programmes broadcast in 2021 in person at next year's Spring Conference in April.

Nomination forms for the awards are included for VLV members with this bulletin. Last year we changed the title of the Radio Awards to Audio Awards to allow podcasts to be included.

The VLV awards celebrate the contribution made by high-quality public service programmes and presenters. We are keen that a wide range of broadcasters should be nominated and we encourage members to nominate programmes from several broadcasters when possible. The awards are unique in giving a voice to our membership, something greatly valued by those who win them.

**Ballot papers should be returned to the VLV office by post or email to [awards@vlv.org.uk](mailto:awards@vlv.org.uk) by Monday 10 January 2022**

Bulletin Autumn 2021



**Voice of the Listener & Viewer**  
Championing Excellence and Diversity in Broadcasting

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VLV represents citizen and consumer interests in broadcasting and champions excellence and diversity. VLV is free from political, sectarian and commercial affiliations. VLV is concerned with the issues, structures, institutions and regulation that underpin the British broadcasting system and in particular to maintain the principles of public service broadcasting.

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

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**FROM THE CHAIRMAN, COLIN BROWNE**



Welcome to our Autumn Bulletin. While much seems to have happened since my last letter, most of the big issues for broadcasting remain unresolved. As I write, we still await news of the BBC funding settlement; we wait to see the contents of a Media Bill expected for this Parliament; and the issue of online harms remains very much in the public eye. We wait also to hear the Government's decision about the future of Channel 4,

its consultation having closed. In the consultation, the Government made clear that privatisation is its preferred option. John Whittingdale, until recently Minister of State at DCMS and a long-term advocate of privatisation, told us, in his session for the VLV in June, that private capital was necessary to secure C4 finances long-term. Many challenge that, not least the Board of C4 who point out that its finances are robust and that its digital strategy has been very successful. More recently, the Government's argument seems to have shifted to highlight the opportunities for C4 as part of an expanded well-financed private sector company. However, the consultation document provided no evidence to support the argument for change.

Our concern is that a C4 in private ownership – particularly if part of a global conglomerate - would inevitably be forced to broadcast more commercial content at the expense of its unique range of often quirky content aimed specifically at UK viewers, not least to generate profit for its shareholders. Key to this issue is C4's remit. At his VLV session, Mr Whittingdale seemed reluctant to say that a new owner would have to respect C4's remit. More recently, the Government has begun to suggest that its remit could actually be strengthened. Claire Enders, in the VLV Jocelyn Hay lecture, suggested that there could be a real opportunity for C4 under new ownership and with a strengthened remit. While that is clearly possible, it seems to us to be putting a very high level of trust in the Government and indeed in a new owner. We wait to see the details of what is proposed in the Media Bill. In the meantime, the VLV remains firmly opposed to privatisation, on the grounds that the case for change has not been made, that UK citizens and viewers risk losing a unique asset in the broadcasting firmament and that there could be great damage done to the UK's very successful independent production sector. You can find our submission to the consultation on our website.

Ministerial changes at DCMS have delayed the announcement of a new funding settlement for the BBC to cover the remaining five years of the current BBC Charter, from April next year. The nature of the settlement will say much about the attitude of the new team towards the BBC - indeed, of the Government as a whole. VLV research has shown that the BBC's public funding has declined by around 25%, in real terms, since 2010. It desperately needs a settlement at least at the level of inflation, and preferably somewhat above, if it is not to be forced into making cuts to its services. This is particularly vital if, as expected, inflation rises over the next couple of years; and there is the added factor that inflation in television production costs is rising well above general inflation.

Given all these critical issues, we are delighted that BBC Chairman Richard Sharp, and Ofcom interim Chair Maggie Carver have agreed to speak at our online Autumn Conference on 24 November. These online events have worked well for us during the pandemic, but it is our hope that we will be able to resume in-person events from next year – perhaps while retaining an online option.

Finally, it was with sadness that we noted the death of Lady Valerie Solti, a long-term VLV patron. She was a great friend and supporter of the VLV and of our founder Jocelyn Hay. She will be sadly missed.

Colin Browne  
Chairman, VLV

## CHANNEL 5 NEWS CHANGES APPROVED BY OFCOM

Ofcom has approved proposals by Channel 5 to broadcast an hour-long bulletin at 5pm rather than the two half hour bulletins it currently puts out at 5pm and 6.30pm. VLV supported these proposals because Viacom, Channel 5's owner, said it would invest more in the hour-long version of the programme and provide more in-depth coverage of stories. We concluded that the proposals would benefit audiences because this move will improve the range and choice of PSB news programmes available to audiences since a 5pm bulletin will not clash with any of the other main PSB channel bulletins. The requested change will not affect the total amount of news that Channel 5 is required to broadcast each year – this will stay the same.

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## BBC ARCHIVE OPENS FOR STUDENTS TO CELEBRATE BBC CENTENARY

The BBC has announced that from January next year its digitised archive will be made available to students in formal education in the UK. The archive holds millions of TV and radio programmes, including interviews and features with almost every major figure of the last 100 years, as well as iconic dramas and comedy programmes. It says all students and educators will be able to access it to help with their studies and fuel their passions.

The BBC has also launched a project called Share Your Story. During 2022 BBC stars and staff will visit schools across the country to inspire the next generation of storytellers. Over 100 of the students' stories will be featured by the BBC on TV, radio and online.

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## EXODUS OF DIVERSE TALENT FROM THE TV INDUSTRY

Ofcom's first five-year report examining diversity and equal opportunities in UK broadcasting has found that more people are leaving the TV and radio industries than are joining. The research shows that broadcasters are struggling to retain talent in the aftermath of the pandemic with more women, particularly, leaving than joining.

The report shows that while representation of minority groups has generally improved, there is a significant lack of diversity among senior decision makers and disabled people remain 'woefully underrepresented'. The diversity of staff in radio has improved less than that in TV. The report suggests that the reason for the lack of diversity among senior management is that broadcasters appear to focus on entry-level recruitment at the expense of retaining diverse staff and enabling them to progress.

Ofcom called on broadcasters to work together to create a more inclusive sector, which will require a greater focus on retention as well as recruitment. It also urged broadcasters to improve data collection so that Ofcom is able to track the state of diversity in the industry.

## BBC MID-TERM CHARTER REVIEW BEGINS

While the BBC's mid-term review isn't going to be fully up and running until 2022, Ofcom has begun the process by running a consultation to ask whether the BBC Operating Licence should be changed to allow a more self-regulatory approach. VLV made a submission to the consultation which is available on its website.

The changes have been proposed because as audiences are viewing more content online some quotas, such as those for 'peak time' viewing, are less relevant. The BBC is proposing that it should be able to set its own targets on an annual basis, some of which should be based on qualitative research rather than quotas, and that Ofcom should review its performance at the end of each year.

While VLV acknowledges that the BBC needs to be allowed flexibility to have creative freedom and to innovate, we do not believe this should be at the expense of robust regulation to ensure it delivers the mission and purposes set out in the Charter for the benefit of licence fee payers.

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## DCMS RESHUFFLE

As a result of the Cabinet reshuffle in September we have a new top team at the DCMS. Nadine Dorries was promoted to become Secretary of State, having previously been a minister for health and social care. She replaced Oliver Dowden who became Conservative Party co-chairman and will attend Cabinet as Minister Without Portfolio. Ms Dorries was elected as MP for Mid Bedfordshire in May 2005. She appeared on ITV's *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here* in 2012.

Julia Lopez was appointed Minister of State, replacing John Whittingdale who returned to the backbenches. Her brief will cover all media and the creative industries. Ms Lopez was previously Parliamentary Secretary at the Cabinet Office and was elected as MP for Hornchurch and Upminster in 2017.

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## REGULATION OF VIDEO ON DEMAND SERVICES

The government is considering whether it should regulate video on demand (VoD) services, such as Netflix and Amazon, in the same way as it regulates broadcasters in the UK.

VLV has made a submission to a DCMS consultation saying that VoD services should be regulated so that audiences, especially those under 18, are better protected against risks such as harm and disinformation. Currently there is no regulation to ensure that factual content on VoD services is accurate or impartial which is of significant concern. VLV would like to see a more 'platform neutral' approach so that all 'TV-like' content is subject to the same rules because research shows that audiences don't understand that regulation of different platforms varies significantly. The lack of consistent regulation also puts linear broadcasters at a commercial disadvantage because they have to uphold far higher standards than the VoD platforms.

## DIGITAL RADIO AND AUDIO REVIEW

The government-commissioned Digital and Audio Review has been published. Its goal is to assess future trends in listening, making recommendations to government on how to strengthen UK radio and audio for the next ten to fifteen years. While this project has been run primarily by industry, VLV has had a number of meetings with the team focused on listeners' needs and we have been given the opportunity to highlight our concerns.

The research shows that audiences are increasingly using digital devices to listen to audio content, especially when they allow on-demand, time-shifted listening. Although overall radio consumption remains high, it is much lower among younger audiences and people from ethnic minority backgrounds, who are instead switching to podcasts and streaming music services.

VLV has been concerned that, in the face of technological change, policymakers might overlook the importance of traditional radio. However, the Review predicts that 'radio will retain a central role in UK media for at least the next 10-15 years.... [and] live radio will still account for over 50% of UK audio listening in the mid-2030s.' The report recommends there should be no switch-off of analogue radio until at least 2030. This means FM could be secure for another 9 years. The review recommends a further review into FM by 2026.

As more listeners switch to smart speakers for radio content, industry is increasingly concerned. The challenge for policymakers is how to ensure that UK audiences continue to have easy access to UK radio and audio content when the tech companies which manufacture smart speakers have become the gatekeepers to what audiences hear. There is nothing in current regulations to prevent tech companies from restricting our access to UK radio services or charging radio stations to carry or promote their output.

Many of the problems the radio industry faces are similar to those of TV broadcasters with smart TVs and the US video streaming platforms. Discoverability of content is a key issue, as are access to audience data and the potential of having to pay tech companies if they want to be carried on their devices. Radio stations are also worried that when their content is broadcast on a smart speaker there is far less association with their brand, which has implications when convincing audiences to pay the licence fee in the future.

Key recommendations include turning off MW in the next few years, legislation to force tech companies to carry UK services free of charge, consideration of prominence for radio stations and content which offers public value, the scrapping of regulations which stop companies changing the format of their output or rebranding their stations, continued financial support for the Audio Content Fund to produce material for under-served audiences, a law to prevent tech companies from inserting their own adverts without a broadcaster's consent, as well as legislation requiring car manufacturers to continue to display radio stations on car dashboards prominently.

The government will publish a formal response in due course and reflect on the findings as part of its review of broadcasting regulation.

You can read the full Radio Review report here: <https://getdigitalradio.com/find-out-more/digital-review/>

## JOCELYN HAY LECTURE 2021 CLAIRE ENDERS



We were privileged to have the founder of Enders Analysis, Claire Enders, deliver the Jocelyn Hay Lecture 2021 on October 11th.

As one of the leading analysts of the UK's creative and broadcast industries, Claire's view of the challenges facing UK broadcasting and the potential solutions to support public service broadcasting was fascinating.

Her lecture provided an overview of the state of broadcasting in the UK and current audience trends. It highlighted that while there has been a decline in viewing by younger audiences, older age groups watch as much TV as they did a decade ago - the over 65's watch more. Streaming content online, especially via the global (US owned) platforms, has soared, as has their spending on content which dwarfs that of the public service broadcasters (PSBs). This is driving up the inflation of content costs for everyone.

Despite all that, it appears that PSB is still very popular and valued. In 2020 22% of all video viewing was of BBC services and a further 28% was of the commercial PSB channels (ITV, C4 and C5). And there are estimated to be over 8 million adults in the UK who don't want to or can't afford to pay for a subscription service, which is a significant proportion of the population.

Her lecture also highlighted the decline in BBC funding since 2010 and the risk that, if the upcoming funding settlement isn't adequate, the BBC will be forced to make cuts to its services.

On the issue of Channel 4 Claire said that it is financially sustainable while delivering its current remit. She said that if it is privatised it's crucial that its culture is maintained and it continues to serve the under-represented in the UK. She went further to suggest that its remit could be strengthened. She believes that if its remit is strengthened and it were sold to a commercial company this would afford it benefits in additional access to capital.

She finished her lecture with a call to the government to secure the long term future of free to air public service broadcasting in the UK by providing the BBC with an adequate settlement and by implementing Ofcom's recommendations set out in its summer PSB Review statement which included prominence for PSB content.

The lecture was followed by a question and answer session with the audience. Claire ended the event by saying that if the Media Bill includes measures which really support PSB, she sees the glass as half-full rather than half-empty and she urged everyone, 'Let us all work together for this more positive future'.

# BROADCASTERS HAVE A RELIGION PROBLEM.

By Anna McNamee



Credit: Witness - Buddha in Africa, Thinking String Media, SSM 2021 Journalism Award runner up

It's a popular misconception in broadcasting that religion is a niche interest. As a result, religious programming is often relegated to those 'in-between', hard-to-fill slots: at dawn, just before midnight or bouncing around the Sunday afternoon schedule when only the truly dedicated can find it. Schedulers will say this reflects the decline of organised religion – mainstream Christianity in particular – and that marginalisation of religion in the mainstream schedule is less relevant because audiences can find it online if they want it. Given the times we live in, this is a depressingly narrow vision.

For the great majority of the world's population religion is the prism through which they understand their lives and their relationship to others. To dismiss religion as a motivator is to ignore, for instance, how in many countries the tension between secularism and religiosity parallels a tension between liberal and conservative political visions. Nor is this relationship unique to places like Afghanistan, India or Burma. Consider Texas, Covid vaccination rates among some faith communities in Europe, or the conflict over PSHE education in UK schools. Whether you're a believer or not, religion matters.

Which is why we at the Sandford St Martin Trust feel some alarm at the news Ofcom is considering replacing the BBC's quotas with a new system that will allow the broadcaster to set its own targets.

PSB investment in and the amount of religious content broadcast are already in stark decline. In their 2017 Religion and Ethics Review, the BBC set out a strategy for religious programming, identifying challenges and laying out how it would respond. Welcome, to be sure, but let's be clear: no strategy is worth the paper it's written on unless it gives stakeholders the tools by which to measure success.

Those tools include quotas. The numbers evidence what has been spent, how many hours have been commissioned and how many broadcast. In an industry where executives come and go, quotas provide continuity and transparency. What's the alternative? If broadcasters are committed to accountability, then they must also commit to the publication of data. If we agree that religion matters, then I hope we can agree that quotas matter too.

*Anna McNamee is Executive Director of the Sandford St Martin Trust, a charity that advocates for thought-provoking, distinctive programming that engages with religion, ethics or morality.*

# DIVERSITY IN BROADCASTING

By Professor Sarita Malik

A new study, *Racial Diversity Initiatives in UK Film & TV*, commissioned by The Film and TV Charity, was published in September. Co-authored by myself and Dr Clive Nwonka, the report examines diversity initiatives generated by UK film and television industry over the last two decades. The primary focus of the report is how diversity policies have sought to address racial and ethnic workforce inequalities in the sector.

The study finds that whilst the film and television sectors have clearly demonstrated a concern with diversity and inclusion in their policy initiatives, in practice the apparatus of "diversity" has not successfully tackled structural inequalities. For example, "diversity" has remained distanced from the structural racism that conditions the experience of so many within the industry.

Amongst the report's key findings are that there are problems with the evaluation and accountability of diversity outcomes and reporting within the sector. There is also an overemphasis on quantitative data (to measure workforce representation) rather than qualitative data. Quantitative data can measure workforce representation, but it does not capture the direct experiences of those who work in the sector or more complex issues such as intersectionality. Diversity policies also put a lot of emphasis on entry-level diversity, training and 'skilling up' young and emerging talent, rather than investing in the talent-base that already exists. There is a failure to tackle head-on the problems of attrition and retention of those with protected characteristics.

This report came out just before the publication of Ofcom's Diversity report which reviewed diversity in UK broadcasting over the past five years. The Ofcom review echoed many of our findings, including problems with retention, an over-emphasis on entry-level recruitment, and a knowledge gap (which we suggest is partly down to the kind of data that is collected). Ofcom's recommendations are that broadcasters should refocus on retention, progression, and senior recruitment; consider setting retention targets; improve the quantity and quality of data collection; be more transparent in reporting their successes and failures; listen to those with experience within institutions; and build diversity in collaborative, rather than competitive, ways.

One of our most urgent recommendations is for the sector to allow more robust accountability and evaluation of its own diversity strategies. We recognise that questions of diversity are rarely out of the spotlight and that organisations are good at publicising their initiatives in this area. Given the persistence of structural inequalities for some communities in the sector, we therefore question the efficacy of diversity policymaking over the past 20 years and why it has not produced the meaningful outcomes it has set out to achieve.

*Professor Sarita Malik is Professor of Media, Culture and Communications at Brunel University London and a VLV Trustee.*

# CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN'S CONTENT IS NEEDED

By Professor Jeanette Steemers



The Young Audiences Content Fund (YACF) has made a difference in children's TV production, funding the development and production of 150 hours across 42 brand new innovative UK originated programmes over 2 years. As the YACF makes its case for further support to the Government ahead of the Autumn spending review, its vital contribution needs acknowledgment and its funding needs to be put on a more secure footing - with additional funding, not just a raid on the licence fee.

Investing £30.3M by the end of its second year in content with public service value for distribution on free-to-access platforms, the fund has undoubtedly boosted content for older children, live action and drama and content that allows children to see 'their lives on screen', gaps that have been identified several times over by Ofcom and others as weaknesses in the sector.

In September the Fund published its Year 2 evaluation report which makes for interesting reading. In Year 2, in spite of the pandemic and an initial reduction in commissioning, it supported 25 productions and 57 development projects with £17.7m, leveraging a further £26.3m from other funders, amounting to 38% of production project funding. This is less than the 50% eligibility threshold, but underlines how many funding sources the fund has attracted - including commercial funders.

Reinvigorating support for children's content from the UK's public service commercial channels (ITV, Five, Channel 4), as well as the indigenous language broadcasters BBC Alba, S4C and TG4 and other free to air services, the fund has also raised morale in the independent sector - with 137 different largely SME production companies from all around the country benefitting, reinforcing the YACF's commitment to new voices and the Nations and Regions. The majority of all supported projects in Year 2 were live action or largely live action mixed media programmes - including scripted drama for children and teens (*Tell Me Everything* for ITV2; *Big Boys* for C4; *Ted's Top 10* for CITV; *Triùir Aig Trì (3@3)* for BBC Alba; *Person/A* and *Y Gyfrinach/The Secret* for S4C), unscripted, award-winning popular dating format *Teen First Dates* on E4 and Channel 5's factual entertainment show *Go Green with the Grimwades* which tackles green issues for preschoolers with its focus on a popular dual heritage YouTube influencer family.

Research commissioned by the BFI from Cardiff University among 4-18 year olds who participated in the

BFI's See Yourself on Screen Challenge underlines the continued need for the fund and freely available screen content for all children. This was particularly true during the pandemic when children and teenagers were isolated from friends and family and their creative ideas and responses demonstrate what they value about British content made for them. Children's voices from the research reveal the vital role of TV in creating a sense of community through shared viewing and experiences, regardless of platform, but also their desire to have their voices heard on important political, economic and environmental issues. Yet just 24% of those surveyed in 2021 believe that TV shows children and young people who look like them, with those from ethnic minority backgrounds, single parent families or those with a disability feeling more underrepresented. Children, particularly older children, acknowledged the importance of YouTube and social media, but were also concerned about the negative experiences of engaging with social media. 55% of children still watched TV regularly on a TV set, ahead of tablets, computers and mobile phones.

These findings underscore the importance of interventions by the BFI's YACF, whose investment in content that represents the diversity of children and their experiences, is making a valuable contribution to the range of quality, free-to-air programming that children can access - especially in these challenging times.

*An earlier version of this was published by the Children's Media Foundation.*

*Professor Jeanette Steemers is Professor of Culture and the Creative Industries at Kings College, London. She is a board member of the Children's Media Foundation, Chair of the YACF Steering Committee and a VLV Trustee.*

## AUDIBILITY IS STILL A PROBLEM

**Letter from Jill Allen-King OBE, VLV Member**

As a founder member of VLV I have attended many conferences. One issue I have raised many times is that background music prevents me and other listeners hearing the spoken word.

I am totally blind and now aged 81 years old. Over the lockdown I listened to a lot more television than usual. I have noticed so many more programmes with background music. It is on gardening and cookery programmes and all kinds of documentaries. Even on religious programmes they play music while prayers are being said and over bible readings. Every Sunday on all local radio stations there is a service from 8am until 8.30am. This always has music playing while the prayers and readings are being spoken.

When I asked a question about this at the VLV Spring Conference in April, Terry Burns, the former Chairman of Ofcom, said this issue had never passed his desk. It seems that all channels are now using this method of broadcasting.

This subject has been raised recently in my local paper and was commented on by people who are hard of hearing who said it also prevents them from hearing the spoken words.

## THE “GOLDEN AGE OF ITV” – IS THERE A LESSON FOR REGIONAL BROADCASTING?

By Peter Gordon

I have been studying ITV prior to 1992 when it was a truly regional network with each regional television company having its own schedule. What struck me was the wide range of programmes that were produced for each region and 40% were not news programmes. How many regional documentaries and general interest regional programmes are produced in England today? In the 1970's a regional ITV company might produce 15 hours of programmes a week; around a third of the ITV programme budget went on such content.

It wasn't just regional programmes; three of the “big five” companies in the '70s and '80s were based out of London in Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham and from 1984 in Nottingham, whilst the medium-sized contractors also produced for the network.

Having done this research, I have two suggestions. The first is that more programmes, and not just regional news, are produced for the regions. Some of these might be of interest to a wider audience and it is important that i-player, ITV Hub and the like allow anyone in the country to view these programmes. I reckon that a typical region would need to be given £20m p.a. to produce an hour of content per weekday, so maybe £200m p.a. to cover the country, which would need to come from somewhere, but not from the existing licence fee which is already overstretched. This is not really a large sum.

The second suggestion is a series of regional centres – many already exist. The obvious gap is Birmingham, but should we not resuscitate centres in Southampton, Norwich and Newcastle (if they are considered the best places to serve their regions)?

There are of course a number of issues with these suggestions. Regions, however small, are not homogenous and the tastes of people in different parts of Yorkshire (but name any region) will differ. Regional ITV output was based on transmitter coverage and, whilst UHF transmitters served smaller areas, there were many instances of areas receiving the “wrong” programmes – this was particularly true in the Humber area. However this is less of an issue with modern distribution systems.

What of the diversity issue? A programme produced in Leeds might reflect the ethnicity of the region but not the country as a whole. Let's not be stereotypical. Not everyone in the north has a strong regional accent (most ITV regional announcers didn't). It's a fraught area!

Also, let's not forget that London has the best links to other parts of the country and the world and remains the obvious place to host many shows. In the '70s there was a BBC programme called *Nationwide* based in London but with inserts from regional centres. Is this the answer for ITV's morning talk shows and indeed many other types of programmes?

*Peter Gordon is a VLV Trustee*

## MEDIA POLICY RESEARCH – WHY IT MATTERS FOR CITIZENS

VLV Trustee, Maria Michalis, a Reader in Communication Policy at the University of Westminster, has written a chapter for the recently published *Routledge Companion to the Media Industries*.

It's relevant to VLV because it explores the fundamental significance of media policy in society. She explains that 'Media policy matters because the media matter. The media matter because they have power' to enable and inform; to deceive; to shift the balance of power between the state and citizens and between different countries.

Maria looks at what media policy consists of, distinct from other areas of policymaking such as communications and cultural policy. It comprises diverse matters such as 'who can own or control the media, the allocation of scarce resources such as radio frequencies, the remit and funding of public service broadcasting (a core public policy intervention), public subsidies for the press, regulation of media content and advertising rules'. She also discusses how different contexts and ideas, such as neoliberalism, influence media policy. She notes that communication rights and the idea of media policy as social policy have become more mainstream due to changes in the media market. Misinformation and disinformation, the growing power of global platforms and the importance of personal data which companies mine for profit are all influencing this trend.

She outlines the process of policymaking which, she highlights, is not linear despite researchers often dividing it into stages. She points out that policymaking is 'often messy' with small incremental adaptations, and reaching outcomes that can even be accidental.

Two particularly interesting observations are that firstly it is important 'to examine the invisible ... impacts of inaction and non-decisions', which in many instances policy studies neglect because instead they tend to focus on visible decisions; secondly, there are few studies on the implementation of policies and policy failures. Without effective evaluation of policy implementation, how will we ever improve our media policymaking processes?

She ends by saying that it is important that media policy studies shouldn't provide a description of policymaking and policies, but instead aim to 'offer...an analysis of policy within wider historical, socioeconomic, and institutional power frameworks with the aim to promote interventions that advance the public interest.'

This book includes 49 chapters from experts in media industries research, providing an overview of the current state of scholarship while setting out proposals for expanding, re-thinking and innovating the field.

*The Routledge Companion to Media Industries* (<https://www.routledge.com/The-Routledge-Companion-to-Media-Industries/McDonald/p/book/9780367225261>)

## THE LONGEVITY OF POPULAR BBC PRESENTERS

In recent months there has been some audience upset reported in the press following changes to the presenters of a couple of popular BBC programmes. In August Clive Myrie stepped into John Humphrys' shoes on *Mastermind* with admirable composure and in September a new cast was introduced to *A Question of Sport*. Many of us find change difficult...

After a little research we realised how successful the BBC has been at retaining the presenters of many of its most popular shows over the years.

### Mastermind

Magnus Magnusson 25 years  
John Humphries 18 years

### Question Time

Robin Day 10 years  
David Dimbleby 24 years

### Question of Sport

David Colman 18 years  
Sue Barker 24 years

### University Challenge

Bamber Gascoigne 25 years  
Jeremy Paxman 26 years

### Any Questions

Jonathan Dimbleby 32 years

## VLV AGM 2021

The 19th Annual General Meeting of Voice of the Listener & Viewer Ltd will be held on Thursday, 2 December 2021 from 1030 - 1130am.

Because of continuing uncertainty over Covid-19, the AGM will be held online using Zoom. You can register your interest to attend on the VLV website. Further details will be circulated with the agenda and papers.

Nominations and resolutions should be sent not less than 3 days and not more than 21 days before the AGM to:

The Chairman,  
VLV,  
The Old Rectory Business Centre,  
Springhead Road,  
Northfleet,  
Kent, DA11 8HN.

Papers for the AGM will be emailed in advance and copies by post will be available on request by contacting Lucy Regan at the VLV office.

## Diary Dates

### VLV Autumn Conference

Wednesday  
24 November 2021  
10.30am-12.45pm

Online

### VLV AGM

Thursday  
2 December 2021  
10.30am-11.30am

Online

VLV will announce other events during the coming months - watch email alerts and the website for details.

### Please send us your email address

VLV sends out regular updates by email so if you haven't registered your email address with us or your email address has changed, please could you let Lucy in the VLV office know by emailing [info@vlv.org.uk](mailto:info@vlv.org.uk).



## NEW SUBSCRIPTION / DONATION / CHANGE OF ADDRESS\* (delete as appropriate)

**VLV Subscription** - Individual £30 Joint (two at same address) £45 Student e-membership £10

Please make cheques payable to VLV and send to The Old Rectory Business Centre, Springhead Road, Northfleet, Kent DA11 8HN or pay online at [www.vlv.org.uk](http://www.vlv.org.uk)

PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS

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