



# Voice of the Listener & Viewer

Championing Excellence and Diversity in Broadcasting

Autumn 2024

Bulletin 138

## VLV RESEARCH: BBC PUBLIC FUNDING DROPS 40% SINCE 2010

Analysis by the VLV shows that in real terms BBC public funding has declined by just over 40% since 2010. This is due partly to the Government siphoning off TV Licence income, to pay for other services such as broadband rollout and local TV, and partly due to a reduction in the number of licence fee payers.

One of the issues Lisa Nandy, the new Secretary of State for DCMS, will have to address is whether the funding model of the BBC should be reformed as part of the Charter renewal process. The current Charter runs until 1st January 2028, which may seem a long way off, but in reality there is much to decide before then.

Earlier this year the previous Government appointed a Review Panel to evaluate the BBC funding model and assess alternative options, but this panel was disbanded when the snap election was called. How it is funded is a crucial issue for the BBC and will be central in determining its future.

The BBC is currently funded by income from the TV Licence which has to be paid by anyone consuming live TV or content on the iPlayer in the UK (regardless of how they access it). It also receives income from government grants for the World Service and its commercial activities. You do not need a licence to listen to BBC radio.

The latest BBC Annual Report showed that half a million households cancelled their TV Licence last year which, worryingly, suggests that increasingly people feel able to go without BBC services.

The Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, and Lisa Nandy have expressed support for public funding of the BBC, unlike the previous Government which said it might abolish the licence fee. It remains to be seen whether the new Government will seek to maintain the existing model or change it.

VLV made recommendations to the former Government which are available on our website along with analysis of data from the BBC's latest Annual Report. Whichever funding model is chosen, it should be one which is universal, so that everyone in the UK pays for the BBC and in return it provides a service which is available across the whole of the country free of charge and is relevant to all viewers in some way. It is essential that the Government consults citizens before making any decision on the funding model; it should also commission a full independent analysis of the impact any changes are likely to have so that citizens can make an informed decision about their national broadcaster.

## VLV AUTUMN CONFERENCE Thursday 28th November 2024



VLV's 41st Autumn Conference will be held at The Geological Society, Piccadilly, London, from 10.30am - 4pm, on Thursday 28th November.

During the day VLV President, Lord Tony Hall, will lead a session with one of the UK's foremost TV producers, Alan Yentob, who held many of the most important roles at the BBC during his long career.

During the conference we will also cover current important issues for citizens in broadcasting — the future of the BBC, the production of British content, how to ensure that news is trustworthy and the future of important public service content, including speech radio and podcasting.

To find out more and **book for the event, please go to <https://www.vlv.org.uk/upcoming-events/>**, complete the enclosed booking form, or contact us.

## THE VLV AWARDS 2023



The VLV Awards were held on 24th April 2024 in central London, presented by broadcaster Clive Myrie.

We were delighted to see so many of the winners at the ceremony, including broadcasters Jeremy Bowen and Matthew Banister, Jon Culshaw and Jan Ravens of *Dead Ringers*, Petroc Trelawny, Nicky Murphy, the Director of ITV drama *A Spy Among Friends* and Rebecca Atkinson, creator of C5 children's programme *Mixmups*.



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

**VLV Patrons**

Lord Tony Hall—President  
Sir Peter Bazalgette  
Ms Helen Boaden  
Mr Roger Bolton  
Mr Mark Damazer CBE  
Rt Revd Lord Eames OM  
Ms Claire Enders  
Sir Francis Graham-Smith FRS  
Lord Inglewood DL  
Lord Puttnam CBE  
Ms Gillian Reynolds CBE  
Ms Sarah Thane CBE JP  
Sir John Tusa  
Mr Will Wyatt CBE

**VLV Trustees**

Mr Alan Barlow  
Professor Robert Beveridge  
Mr Andrew Board  
Mr Colin Browne (Chairman)  
Ms Toni Charlton  
Ms Mary Dixon (Secretary)  
Mr Peter Gordon (Treasurer)  
Professor Sylvia Harvey  
Mr Allan Jack  
Mrs Sue Washbrook  
Professor Bob Usherwood  
Mr Anthony Wills

**VLV Office**

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

**Tel: 01474 338716**  
**e-mail: info@vlv.org.uk**



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

Sophie Chalk Policy Advisor  
Sarah Stapylton-Smith Administrator  
Website www.vlv.org.uk

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.

Registered Address: The Old Rectory Business Centre, Springhead Road, Northfleet, Kent DA11 8HN.

The Bulletin is edited by Sophie Chalk and published by Voice of the Listener & Viewer Ltd, a charitable company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales No 4407712. Charity No:1152136

ISSN 1475-2948

**FROM THE CHAIRMAN, COLIN BROWNE**



Since my last letter in the Spring, the two main developments have been the passing of the Media Bill into law as the Media Act and, of course, the election of a new government.

As you will read elsewhere in this Bulletin, while the Media Act is now law, there remain important issues to be decided on how some of its provisions are to be implemented. Perhaps the most important, from the perspective of public service broadcasting, is the issue of how to make sure PSB content is

easily found on digital platforms. Precisely how will this be applied and which platforms will be in scope? The VLV will be contributing to these discussions, with the aim to ensure that viewers can easily find and access PSB content on whichever platform they are using.

On the broader front, the new Government has yet to show its hand, in a practical sense, on the big issues affecting broadcasting. These issues include BBC funding and the renewal of its Charter. On funding, as we reported in the spring, the previous Government had set up a review to make recommendations. However, the early Election meant that this panel was disbanded, so it is a question of starting over again. The new Government has stressed its support for the BBC and said it wishes to have a thorough review of the funding options but has not yet indicated the form that such a review will take. From our perspective, it is important that a review of funding and of the Charter consults widely, giving licence fee payers the opportunity to contribute; and that the societal value of the BBC is taken fully into account in the deliberations. Once again, the VLV and our colleagues on the JRCT-funded Public Service Media Forum will play a full part in these discussions.

A longer term but very important issue is the future of TV distribution at a time when more and more broadcasters are adopting a digital first strategy, with the emphasis on the online streaming of content (IPTV). This begins to call into question the longevity of broadcast television as we know it today. However, Enders Analysis estimate that while half of all broadcast viewing will be via IP by 2040, 'traditional' TV will remain strong due to the popularity of the live linear schedule. A key point here is that delivery via Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) will remain strongest amongst the older and often less-well off population; and that there is likely still to be a significant number of people who simply cannot get access to broadband. It is also the case that DTT is more secure than internet-based delivery systems.

It is very important therefore that DTT remains in place for the foreseeable future. The challenge for the broadcasters, of course, is that it will become increasingly expensive for them to pay for two delivery systems and that DTT will become relatively more expensive. Ofcom is consulting on these thorny issues in a process in which the VLV intends to participate fully.

The events of the last year have illustrated more clearly than ever how fortunate the UK is to have public service radio and television, providing news and information services that are regulated for accuracy and impartiality. They may not get everything right all the time – and they certainly won't please everyone all the time, given how polarised society can be – but we would be vastly worse off without them.

Finally, thank you to all our members who have sent in donations in recent months; we really appreciate it. And perhaps those of you who receive this Bulletin, but are not yet members, might consider joining. It's only £30 per year!

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at this year's Autumn Conference on 28 November.

Colin Browne  
Chairman, VLV

## NEW DCMS TEAM



Following the General Election on 4 July and the arrival of the new Government, the Rt Hon Lisa Nandy, MP for Wigan, was appointed Secretary of State for the DCMS. Previously Ms Nandy held the brief for International Development.

Her Ministerial team includes Stephanie Peacock MP, who was Shadow Minister when in opposition and worked on the Media Bill during its passage through Parliament, Sir Chris Bryant and Baroness Twycross. The new Secretary of State spoke at the RTS Convention in September, highlighting that she wants to reset the relationship between government and the media—bringing an end to ‘government stoked culture wars’. She explicitly stated the Government’s support for public service broadcasting.

## SIMON ALBURY 1944 – 2024



In September it was announced that Simon Albury, producer, equality campaigner and a ‘striking figure in the industry’ had died at the age of 80.

Simon attended most VLV conferences and, more often than not, asked very challenging

questions of keynote speakers.

During his more than 50 years in the industry Simon made current affairs and music programmes for the BBC and ITV as a senior producer at Granada TV. He also co-founded ITV company Meridian and spent 12 years as chief executive of the Royal Television Society until 2012. As a campaigner, he ran the Campaign for Quality Television, driving significant changes to the 1990 Broadcasting Act in response to plans to sell off ITV regional franchises by auction.

## CHANNEL 4 ANNUAL REVIEW

In its annual review of C4’s content duties, Ofcom has concluded that C4C performed well against its remit in 2023, especially with its news and current affairs output as well as initiatives for younger audiences. But Ofcom has called for greater detail on the PSB’s digital strategy and its ‘outside of London’ commissioning.

The C4C Annual Report showed that it had a challenging year in 2023 with its largest ever deficit (£52m). Its spend on original content was its second highest ever, but it was less than it had intended after it had to make cuts due to the advertising downturn. It expects to report a smaller deficit in 2024 but hopes that digital revenues will continue to grow, offsetting the decline in linear revenues.

## AUDIENCE RESEARCH



Ofcom’s annual Media Nations Report, which was released in July, showed that younger audiences are continuing to turn away from traditional TV, attracted by video on online platforms such as YouTube and TikTok. The research found that in 2023 only 48% of 16-24’s watched TV weekly, compared with 76% in 2018. This is posing a challenge to UK free to air broadcasters, especially those who rely on advertising.

While the long-term decline in viewing of broadcast TV continued, the downward trend does appear to be slowing. Broadcast TV’s weekly reach fell from 79% in 2022 to 75% in 2023. Viewing of video on the PSB video on demand platforms rose by 29% during the year and ‘event TV’, such as the King’s Coronation, still attracted large audiences. Commercial PSB and pay-TV revenues were reported to have fallen to their lowest in over a decade. Revenue by the commercial PSBs (ITV, C4 and C5) fell by 16% in 2023 to £1.9bn. In contrast, streamer subscription revenues grew by 22% to £4bn, driven largely by price rises.

Radio listening, in contrast with broadcast TV, saw a 20 year high in 2023, with commercial radio increasing its average hours per listener. In Q1 of 2024 commercial stations accounted for 54.2% of radio listening vs 43.4% for BBC stations.

## GB NEWS PERMITTED TO LEGALLY CHALLENGE OFCOM SANCTION

The High Court has granted GB News the right to challenge an Ofcom sanction for breaching the Broadcasting Code.

In May Ofcom said it was considering a statutory sanction against the channel after concluding that an hour-long live programme in February, *The People’s Forum: The Prime Minister*, which featured Rishi Sunak answering audience questions, had breached due impartiality regulations. GB News said it had intended for Labour’s views to be represented in a follow-up programme with Keir Starmer, but this had not been announced at the time of the Sunak Q&A and then it was cancelled after Ofcom’s intervention.

In a recent ruling in the High Court Mr Justice Chamberlain allowed the channel to challenge the finding because he said its arguments ‘raise grounds of considerable public importance’.

GB News also wanted to prevent Ofcom from publishing the sanction because they said it would cause ‘irreparable damage’ to its reputation. The Judge overruled this request, however Ofcom has pledged not to publish the sanction until the case has been heard.

Ofcom said that the February breach was the channel’s twelfth since March 2023. Potential sanctions include telling GB News not to repeat content, forcing it to air a correction or statement of the Ofcom findings, a financial penalty and ultimately the suspending or revoking of their broadcast licence. Any sanction that Ofcom may impose will be subject to the outcome of GB News’ legal challenge.



It has been a busy period since VLV's last bulletin in March. The Government's Media Bill was rushed through Parliament during 'wash up', after the announcement of the General Election, and the Media Act was passed into law on May 24th.

For the past two years VLV has worked hard, along with members of the JRCT-funded Public Service Media Forum, to ensure that citizens' interests were promoted in the new legislation. In the final hours of the debate an amendment was accepted, sponsored by Baroness Bull in the Lords and suggested by VLV, which reintroduced the 'Reithian' principles into the Bill, that public service broadcasting (PSB) should educate, inform and entertain — a move VLV and the PSM Forum members warmly welcome.

It is now up to the Government and Ofcom to ensure that provisions in the new Act is implemented in a timely fashion. These include ensuring that the apps of public service broadcasters (BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5) are easy to find on smart TVs and other streaming devices, allowing the PSBs to deliver the PSB Remit on their online as well as broadcast platforms, requiring that video-on-demand services, such as Netflix, are covered by the Ofcom content code and ensuring that radio stations are available via smart speakers.

VLV is concerned that the range and volume of high quality broadcasting which benefits citizens could decline as a result of the new legislation. The Act no longer demands that public service broadcasters provide what has traditionally been considered societally valuable content, such as arts, religion, education and science programming. The Government did introduce new wording to ensure that an 'appropriate range of genres' should be provided by the PSBs, but what 'appropriate' means is in Ofcom's discretion. Ofcom has assured VLV that it will continue to measure the delivery of this content, but that could be challenging because some of it will now be put on online platforms and methods to assess this provision have not yet been fully developed.

Separately, Ofcom has begun its next review of public service media, which it is statutorily required to do every 5 years. The first phase will explore how the PSBs have delivered for UK audiences over the last five years and set out the challenges over the next decade. The second phase will consider opportunities to support the sustainability of public service media and the availability of high quality and accurate news that audiences can trust. VLV has met with Ofcom officials and made them aware of our concerns. A key issue will be how to ensure a wide range of high quality free to air TV content continues to be available universally for all citizens across the UK in future.

The VLV held its **41st Spring Conference**, on 24th April at the Geological Society in central London. The focus of the day was on how to best support British broadcasting so that it delivers benefits for everyone. Culturally-specific UK broadcasting is increasingly under threat as the popularity of global media platforms grows. Streaming services like Netflix and Prime, and online video platforms such as YouTube and TikTok, are all increasing their share in the UK and this is undermining the financial viability of domestic broadcasters. In addition public funding for the BBC has declined. While none of our speakers could offer a magic wand to solve these problems, there was unanimous support for public service broadcasting and the benefits it affords us.



Speakers included the Chair of the House of Commons DCMS Select Committee, Dame Caroline Dinenage DBE MP, who discussed the Committee's work since she became chair in May 2023. Kevin Lygo, who leads commissioning of all ITV content, spoke in a lively session with ITV News' Romilly Weeks, highlighting the value of impactful series such as *Mr Bates vs the Post Office*. Radio was covered in a session chaired by Roger Bolton with panellists David Lloyd, co-founder of Boom Radio, Jonathan Wall, Director of BBC Sounds, Aradhna Tayal Leach, MD of the Radio Academy and Matt Deegan, founder of Folder Media. Our final session explored how to fund public service broadcasting. This panel was chaired by former VLV President and Chair of Ofcom, Dame Colette Bowe DBE. The speakers were Donald Campbell, Chief Executive of MG Alba, Sarah Clarke of ITV's Media and Entertainment division, Aaqil Ahmed, former BBC and C4 head of Religion and Ethics and Jackie Edwards, former Young Audiences Content Fund Head. Videos of all the sessions are available on our website at: [www.vlv.org.uk/recent-events](http://www.vlv.org.uk/recent-events).

Since the conference, our policy work has focused on the Media Bill and building relationships with relevant members of the new DCMS team. We look forward to meeting the new broadcasting Minister, Stephanie Peacock MP, later in the Autumn.

VLV policy submissions during this period include those in response to BBC proposals to extend its provision of music radio and Radio 5 Sports Extra, a Call for Evidence by the International Development Committee on the future funding of the BBC World Service, a request to reduce quotas for peak-time news on the BBC Scotland channel and a consultation on Channel 4's Made outside England quotas. All VLV policy submissions can be found at [www.vlv.org.uk/issues-policies/vlv-consultation-responses](http://www.vlv.org.uk/issues-policies/vlv-consultation-responses).

# CHILDREN'S TV IN CRISIS

By Greg Childs OBE



At an RTS event recently, US TV analyst Evan Shapiro highlighted a significant decline in subscription television. As on-demand viewing surpasses linear TV, the shift is marked by a growing preference for platforms like YouTube, which Shapiro now identifies as the leading TV channel in the US.

The Children's Media Foundation has been 'a voice in the wilderness' on this issue for some years. The four-footers – the audience we advocate for – led the way. We saw it coming and you'll forgive us for saying, 'We told you so'.

Children are the 'canary in the coalmine' for the switch to on-demand viewing. According to Ofcom children aged 7 and older in the UK now watch only 33 minutes of TV daily - a steady decline from 150 minutes in 2012. Their primary engagement is with platforms like YouTube and TikTok, averaging 74 minutes per day. Viewing of channels such as CBBC or CITV has plummeted – to the extent that ITV closed their children's channel and moved the content to their online player. But the over-7's are not using the broadcasters' video on demand players either. Even when public service content is created specifically for new platforms like YouTube, it struggles to gain visibility due to the lack of algorithmic promotion.

The shift poses significant challenges for broadcasters and producers, as young audiences disconnect from public service content, its values - including impartiality - and its value to them and to society. The canary has in fact fallen off its perch; the future is already here and it has implications for young viewers individually, for society as a whole, and for the long-term survival of public service media.

The Children's Media Foundation held a Children's Media Summit in February this year. It highlighted the lack of age-appropriate, culturally relevant, socially engaged content in young people's media diets and how this contributes to the 'crisis of childhood'. It affects their well-being, their sense of self and their connection with society.

The rise of far-right online influencers among disaffected youth – evidenced by the number of young people involved in the summer riots - underscores the dangers of unregulated online spaces dominating media consumption. And platforms like YouTube and TikTok remain largely unregulated, apart from Ofcom's oversight under the Online Safety Act, which focuses on preventing harm but does little to promote good.

Since the Summit in February the Foundation has been pressing for recognition of this rapidly evolving landscape and the need for new regulatory approaches.

The Media Act addressed public service prominence on smart TVs and streaming services. But there was no consideration of how one might incentivise or regulate YouTube to make public service content prominent.

Equally there is no obligation on the new platforms to financially support the content industry. 400 million children a month use YouTube across the world. It generates substantial advertising revenue that isn't currently sufficiently shared with the production community. It simply doesn't support production at the scale and with the ambition of the old broadcasting system.

So, there's a dual challenge: funding and finding public service content

While the Foundation continues to support the Licence Fee and the BBC's role in the production of high-quality content, that content needs to be re-imagined for the new platforms and most importantly given prominence. We also want to see a revival of the Young Audience's Content Fund. This time it should be financed by a levy on streamers and shared video services which can be assured that the funding is specifically predicated to support the young. This should be content of all sorts and should sit on all the platforms children and young people are using - YouTube, Tik Tok, Instagram and even Roblox. The time has come to consider what constitutes a public service experience in Roblox and how that can be funded and found.

We're advocating no less than a new 'public service compact' for the 21st Century, which recognises the reality of content delivery to young people and will accommodate the new viewing habits of a significant number of adults, as Evan Shapiro has pointed out.

This will require the powerful new platforms to accept their role as part of society, not simply as shareholder-driven corporations, both financially through the levy and in terms of editorial responsibility. The aim will be to replicate the success of the former commercial public service broadcaster arrangements.

Our discussions with Ofcom and policymakers emphasise the urgent need to recreate a society that values public service media. This begins with the organisations that have captured the eyes, ears and minds of our young people and new ways of thinking, rather than shoring up systems that are no longer relevant.

*Greg Childs OBE is Director of the Children's Media Foundation and Editorial Director of the Children's Media Conference. Greg worked for over 25 years at the BBC on children's programmes.*

# LOCAL RADIO

By Mick Ord



So I switched on my car radio and heard two presenters with London accents waxing lyrical about the soul and funk clubs they used to go to in the capital in the 1980's.

They continued to 'wax' for another 15 minutes as I crossed the Mersey Gateway bridge from Runcorn to Widnes, through the farming and post-industrial flatlands into Speke, past Liverpool John Lennon Airport and into Garston.

If you don't know the city, I assume you're already bored by such topographical detail; a series of roads in a place you visit occasionally or never. But I include the information for reasons that will become obvious.

That Saturday night, I wasn't expecting to hear a chat on the radio about the London club scene from 40 years ago because I was listening to BBC Radio Merseyside.

That's the kind of thing you'll hear on BBC local radio at various times wherever you live — i.e. not a local but a regional show – this particular one originating from Radio London and networked across all 39 local stations in England.

If you're a Radio 4 listener, why should you care? Well, imagine how you'd feel if one of your favourite programmes was no longer available and you had to listen to output from another BBC station such as 5 Live, the World Service or Radio Derby, Cornwall or Newcastle.

But they won't be doing that to Radio 4 or 3, or any of the other networks, will they? In fact they want to ADD 'digital extensions' to Radios 1, 2 and 3 on DAB+.

BBC bosses tell us that 'sharing' programmes is now the order of the day to a greater or lesser degree for most local stations (not BBC London) because they're redirecting investment from radio to local online journalism and content production, which will be available on BBC iPlayer and BBC Sounds.

So, better local online journalism and audio and video content across all platforms, but less localness on your radio station.

'Robbing local radio Peter to pay online Paul', you might say, if you were an ex-BBC boss, long used to the unique way the corporation engages with the people who fund it.

The bosses behind the Digital First policy are banking on the numbers of people accessing local audio/video/online content digitally via BBC iPlayer and BBC Sounds to increase dramatically in order to compensate for the loss of local radio listeners, as if they are interchangeable metrics, which they're not.

I should declare an interest.

As a cynical Scouser, who was BBC Radio Merseyside manager for 17 years and with chips on both shoulders, I

think it's fair to say that it's taking me a while to try to adjust to the new local/regional radio schedules.

Despite the assurances of my friends working in BBC Local, I worry for its future and fear that BBC bosses might go OTT with programme-sharing and accelerate a decline in listening with a policy that doesn't value or promote LOCAL radio as much as it should.

In 2021 before the reorganisation plans were announced the BBC local radio audience was down to 6.7million people so a decision was made to reorganise it. Now it's 4.6 million with some stations having recently lost up to 50% of their listeners.

Some stations still have lots of local shows, but I fear that over time they will lose more and more local programmes, shedding their identity ... and listeners.

I fear the BBC centrally will decide to plough even more resources into digital because fewer people are listening to local radio, so that managed decline becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (which incidentally began a few years ago).

Quite what they expect to be coming out of our speakers in five years' time is anybody's guess and a question that nobody at the Beeb seems willing to address publicly right now.

Do they look forward to a day when every station has local programmes just at breakfast time and maybe once or twice a week for sport?

What you don't get with online or audio clips to anything like the same degree is that depth of intimate, emotional, human, one-to-one contact that you get on live radio from a person with local knowledge and local cultural experiences and interactions similar to your own.

Where you live or have lived is an important part of your identity - where you don't live, isn't.

Nobody that I've spoken to in BBC Local is arguing that the future is not digital, it's just that for local radio listeners there's a feeling that they've lost something that isn't being replaced.

The BBC local radio ethos is now being taken up by independent hyper-local community stations, so why hasn't the BBC looked at partnering with that sector rather than trying to force a regional model on licence-fee payers? With no meaningful consultation either.

It might make sense if you're sitting at the centre but here in the sticks it doesn't. And all this in the run-up to the new BBC Charter which will be renegotiated in 2027.

Is this really an effective way to make friends and influence people?



*Mick Ord is a VLV member, Media consultant and podcaster'. He was Managing Editor of BBC Radio Merseyside from 1995 -2012.*

# HAS DIGITAL TERRESTRIAL TV ANY FUTURE?

By Gordon Drury

Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) has been a fundamental part of UK public service broadcasting (PSB) since its launch in 1998 by OnDigital, a commercial venture. Freeview succeeded OnDigital in 2002. The decades old analogue system that had begun in 1936 provided limited programming choice but DTT changed all that.

DTT, conceived in the late 1980s and standardised by the mid 1990s, provided an order of magnitude more channels and was vastly more efficient in its use of scarce radio spectrum. So much so that, in 2012, when all analogue transmissions were discontinued, some of the original analogue spectrum was released to support other services, in particular Mobile Telephony.

In the decade that followed more DTT spectrum was re-allocated to support the growing demands of the Mobile Network Operators (MNOs). That trend remains as the MNOs consistently demand the complete cessation of DTT and the re-allocation of DTT spectrum to themselves.

If DTT were to be discontinued a fully proven equivalent means of delivering PSB content to viewers would be required. The MNOs (using radio spectrum) and Broadband Service providers (using telephone landlines) claim to be able to provide an alternative to DTT. Both these alternatives are based on Internet technology - Internet Protocol (IP). IP pervades all modern communications systems including telephony and actually carries DTT in a core distribution network.

IP provides a common means of delivery for many other services than PSB such that viewing is now spread much more widely than ever with the consequent fragmentation of audiences. PSBs are concerned about the decline in viewing through DTT and have themselves adopted broadband in particular as a means of providing viewers with content as well as DTT. This trend has raised economic issues and the prospect of an end to DTT as an independent means of PSB delivery that is free from commercial interests.

For the time being DTT licences remain in place until 2034 but, considering how long it takes to effect substantial changes in broadcasting infrastructure and for viewers in particular to adapt to those changes, it is not too early to consider whether broadband can replace DTT. If such a transition is to be successful many problems need proven solutions and so, until that is demonstrated, DTT must be retained.

Among the issues to be resolved are reach (coverage), independence, security and resilience especially in rural areas where the economics and quality of service of broadband and mobile are challenging. DTT is a universal Free to Air service whose performance as a valued national asset will be hard to replicate.

*Gordon Drury is a VLV member and retired broadcasting engineer who was directly involved in the development of DTT. He has advised VLV on technical matters for many years and drafted VLV responses to Ofcom and government .*

# SYMPOSIUM ON POPULAR PSB

By Dr Neil Washbourne

A symposium on popular public service broadcasting/media (PSB/PSM) took place at Leeds Beckett University on 11th September. The event was funded by British Academy as part of my research project looking into listeners to BBC Radio 2 - the least researched, though most listened to, radio station in the UK. It was attended by academics presenting the results of their research, VLV Trustee Anthony Wills, PhD students seeking to explore the latest thinking about PSB, academic colleagues and interviewees from the research.

At the symposium I reported back on listeners' thoughts and feelings on BBC Radio 2 with Dr. Lee Broughton from Leeds University, who was research officer on the project. Interviewees said that Radio 2 is definitely a form of PSB for its engagement with popular music culture, important to its listeners and presented to them by trusted DJs. They also valued the station's support for specialist music and the provision of well-respected news, travel and weather information. This is popular PSB, which, in a report for VLV, I argue is crucial to the future of PSB / BBC.

Papers from other academics covered other aspects of popular PSB. For example, Dr. Paul Smith (DeMontfort University) explored the BBC's popular PSB responses to the rising costs of sports rights with their increased focus on women's sports, minority sports and growing use of online platforms to enhance the attractiveness of PSM. Dr Dan Martin, a postdoctoral researcher who works with Professor Catherine Johnson at Leeds University, discussed their research into how online platforms aid viewers' access to fiction, entertainment and factual, non-news television genres and the degree to which algorithms operate in a public service mode by widening the horizon of viewers through their systems of recommendations. Professor Winston Mano from the University of Westminster offered us an example from African public service radio, Radio Zimbabwe, and a popular obituary programme, widely listened to and accessible for those unable to afford print media, which circulates news of deaths of friends and loved ones - a key reminder that economic circumstances limit our access to media. Professor Kate Lacey (University of Sussex) gave a thought-provoking keynote presentation which explored the ethical and civic responsibilities of listening publics, rather than the usual focus of thinking about PSB on mandated content.

A panel discussion of all the paper givers, Anthony Wills, academics and interviewees was unanimous in highlighting the importance of varied popular media outlets, and programme and content forms for understanding and effectively supporting PSB.

*Dr. Neil Washbourne is a VLV member. He teaches at Leeds Beckett University. He is the recipient of the British Academy/ Leverhulme Trust Small Research Grant award for 'Listening to BBC Radio 2 (during Covid-19): understanding and valuing popular public service broadcasting (SRG2223\ 231617)'. Dr. Lee Broughton (Leeds University) is Research Officer on the project.*

## TRUSTEES

Alan Barlow, Professor Robert Beveridge and Anthony Wills, all of whom have completed two three-year stints as Trustees, are obliged to stand down for a year before they can be re-elected. We would like to thank them for all the work, support and time they have devoted to the VLV.

All our trustees are volunteers and without them the VLV would not be able to carry out its important work. If you are interested in working with the VLV as a volunteer or becoming a VLV trustee, please get in touch with the chairman, Colin Browne.

## VLV AGM 2024

The 22nd Annual General Meeting of Voice of the Listener and Viewer Ltd will be held on Thursday, 28 November 2024 at 1615, at The Geological Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1J 0BG.

Nominations and resolutions should be sent to the Chairman at VLV, The Old Rectory Business Centre, Springhead Road, Northfleet, Kent, DA11 8HN, not less than 3 days and not more than 21 days before the AGM. Papers for the AGM will be emailed in advance and copies by post will be available on request by contacting Sarah Stapylton-Smith at VLV.

## NOMINATIONS FOR THE VLV AWARDS 2024

Nomination forms for the VLV Awards, covering programmes across the whole of 2024, are included with this Bulletin. The Awards celebrate the contribution made by high-quality public service programmes and presenters. As always, there is a wide range of programming to choose from across the broadcasting spectrum. Please do take the time to vote for your favourite programmes to help VLV celebrate the achievement of those who did such a good job informing, educating and entertaining us during 2024. Winners particularly value these awards because they are chosen by the people who matter: their listeners and viewers. We are keen to include a wide range of broadcasters and we encourage members to nominate programmes from several broadcasters where possible.

**Nominations should be returned to the VLV office by post or email by 20th January 2025.**

## Diary Dates

**VLV Autumn Conference**  
**Thursday 28 November 2024**  
**10.30am - 4pm**  
The Geological Society,  
Piccadilly, London

**VLV AGM**  
**Thursday 28 November 2024**  
**4pm - 5pm**  
The Geological Society,  
Piccadilly, London

**VLV Spring Conference & Awards**  
**Wednesday 30 April 2025**  
**10.30am - 4pm**  
The Geological Society,  
Piccadilly, London

**VLV will announce other events over the coming months. Please check email alerts, and the VLV website for details.**

## Please send us your email address

VLV sends out regular email updates.

If you haven't registered your email address with us, or your email address has changed, please let us know at [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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Post Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

OR to pay by Credit Card please complete the form below or telephone 01474 338716

Name of Cardholder: \_\_\_\_\_

Card type: Mastercard  Visa  Expiry date  /  /  Issue No.   CVS    (last 3 digits of security on reverse of card)

Card No.     /     /     /     Amount £ \_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Cardholder \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to pay by standing order  please send me a form.



I would like to GiftAid my payment  please send me a form