



Written evidence submitted by
Save Our BBC CIC
To “A Future for Public Service Television:
Content & Platforms in a Digital World”
On 30 April 2016

Independent Campaign
For The Users Of BBC

Introduction

1. *Save Our BBC CIC (Save Our BBC)* is a community interest company, limited by guarantee. It is an independent campaign organisation for the audience and users of the BBC. It is a subscription organisation, has supporters, subscribers, donors and followers. It operates mainly online and using social media.
2. *Save Our BBC* provides weekly information e-bulletins about the BBC and about its campaigning activities to its subscribers, and comments upon developments relevant to the BBC's future.
3. The aims of *Save Our BBC* are:
 - a. To See the BBC survive and thrive
 - b. To See the BBC's contribution to UK citizenship recognised
 - c. To Ensure the BBC is recognised as a cultural entity, contributing to our civil society and not 'just a producer of consumables', and
 - d. For the maintenance and development of the BBC's media content, production, broadcast and online services in its forthcoming Royal Charter & Licence Fee reviews.
4. Please see our website for full information about *Save Our BBC* at www.saveourbbc.net .
5. The Directors and staff of *Save Our BBC* are entirely independent of the BBC other than being members of its audiences and users of its services.

The social and cultural purposes of television today

6. The BBC is the market maker of the best television broadcasting in the world. It is at the heart of the Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) ethos of UK broadcasting which was born in radio, moved into television and must survive and thrive into the digital age.
7. Commercial broadcasters have joined the UK broadcasting market place knowing the BBC is already there and of the PSB ethos. The BBC is NOT a market intervention. The UK broadcasting market place is a mixed economy one.
8. This is because broadcast programmes and content are not consumables like baked beans or motor vehicles. Television programmes are cultural, with social impact, build community and communities and shape UK citizenship.
9. UK Public Service Television (PSTV) is essential to the Common Good.
10. The dilution of UK PSTV with the destruction of the regional ITV structure and its PSB obligations must not be allowed to continue by a single jot. Whilst we also have Channel 4, some fundamentals of PSB have been lost including regional current affairs and specialist programming. As a result the BBC is left alone with some genres for instance children's, natural history and religious television.
11. We know from the examples of other Commonwealth countries that when PSTV is diluted, destroyed or lost it is irretrievable. Thus we reduce UK PSTV at our peril.

12. The history of UK radio provides a salutary lesson. There is a proliferation of radio stations; they are now amalgamated in conglomerates; they have all gravitated in their output to the middle ground because that is where the advertising income lies.
13. The UK has a proliferation of television channels. Their output is already gravitating towards popular programming which easily attracts advertising and subscription income. Otherwise they rely largely upon PSTV production for alternative content and only PSTV channels produce and broadcast/'publish' new quality programmes/content particularly in genres of a minority interest.
14. A full range and volume of all PSTV genres must remain available to the entire UK audience/population on free to air television.

Changing production, consumption and distribution practices and indeed the very meaning of 'television' in a digital age

15. The present range of production of PSTV programming/content must be maintained. BBC, ITV and other major channel studios along with independent production companies must remain able to produce the full range of PSTV output.
16. There is no doubt that the ways in which audiences access televised programmes and content are changing.
17. That does call into question the meaning of 'television' for the future. Broadcast visual and audio programmes and content are already being enjoyed on computers, laptops, tablets, smartphones and other devices.
18. This is forecast to continue and increase. The demise of radio was forecast when television arrived. That has not happened.
19. Will the same happen and television as we know it survive? Does it matter?
20. For us "it's the programmes and content, stupid" to attempt to coin a political statement.
21. Our point is that however production, consumption and distribution may change, the need for quality PSTV programmes and content will continue undiminished. They are clearly wanted by their audiences. The citizen audiences and users, the stakeholders of our PSTV ecology, must be heard and respected.
22. The full range of information, education and entertainment must remain available to be accessed by their audiences.

Funding and regulation of public service platforms and their content together with broader questions of regulation to secure public service across the UK TV landscape

23. The Communications Act 2003 may have been overtaken by technological advances but the PSTV ethos it defined remains relevant and applicable and will do for decades to come.
24. PSTV must remain free to air so that it is universally accessible. This is because of its social and cultural importance.
25. Once the remit for PSTV across the board is agreed (an ongoing exercise with review of Charters and licences) adequate funding must continue to be available. The present funding mix suits all the broadcasters. The Secretary of State has explained to Parliament the limits of the advertising revenue pot and the extra costs of introducing subscription to PSTV channels.
26. Neither the BBC nor Channel 4 nor their audiences should be penalised by the significant extra costs of having to take subscriptions. The rest of the broadcasters would be severely damaged were BBC TV to take advertising.

27. The Licence Fee is regarded by some people as being anachronistic. We suspect it will be subject to a major review in the coming decade. We do not believe that being 'regressive' should be taken as a criticism. We also believe that the origin of the licence fee as being a permit to receive broadcast content should be retained. We welcome the promise by the Government to close the View on Demand (VoD) loophole.
28. The main point is that, however they are produced, consumed and distributed, PSTV programmes and content must remain available in their present quantities, quality and range.
29. Citizen produced material will never replace professionally produced PSTV. That myth has already been debunked. Whilst there is a place for citizen produced material, mainly on social media, the overall appetite of audiences and users for quality content has never been greater.
30. Whilst the BBC is the originator of PSTV it is now part of a mixed economy PSB ecology. The PSB ethos now extends to other free to air licenced television broadcasters. The BBC must not have a monopoly on PSTV and must not become a monopoly of PSTV. Somehow, the BBC must be fully and properly funded and regulated to deliver its PSTV and PSB remit and so must all the other PSTV providers.
31. The 2010 Licence Fee settlement and the 2015 'agreement' about the next Licence Fee were both completely unacceptable in the manner in which they were negotiated and agreed. This political interference has undermined the independence of the BBC.
32. The future funding and regulation of PSTV broadcasters must enable and ensure that PSTV programmes and content in their present range and volume remain freely and fully available to the entire population and are prominently publicised so that they remain at the heart of UK culture, society and citizenship.
33. The regulatory framework must continue to make PSTV a real priority. If Ofcom is to become the sole regulator then it must move from being so economically and consumer orientated and fully embrace the aspects of public service, social and community interests, citizenship and the Common Good.

The representation of UK citizens in the television landscape in terms of ethnicity, gender, nationality and class

34. Since the creation of *Save Our BBC* we have consistently campaigned for a much greater attention to the nations and regions by the BBC to reflect better devolution and local communities.
35. This requirement to improve significantly equality and diversity in the workforces, coverage, on screen portrayal and accessibility must apply to all PSTV broadcasters.
36. This diversity must include: race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status [rather than 'class'], age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, and other ideologies.
37. Accessibility requires attention particularly by engaging effectively with small clusters of the sorts of diverse groups mentioned in the previous paragraph. This must include groups newly migrating to the UK to help them understand the principles of UK citizenship and enable them to settle comfortably.

The performance of specific public service genres, including current affairs, drama, news and sport

38. The quality and quantity of PSTV drama, news and current affairs is relatively high at present. Drama is popular with commercial TV broadcasters as it attracts both audiences and funding.
39. It is interesting to observe that criticism of bias in news and current affairs is largely targeted at one PSTV broadcaster, which is the BBC, when all PSTV news and current affairs is of a similar ilk. It does seem that those who broadcast a greater volume of news and current affairs and give more coverage to particular aspects of an issue in single reports, packages and programmes, have to bear the criticism of bias as their overall balance taken over their entire coverage of an issue is not so readily appreciated.
40. The cuts to PSTV sporting coverage are counterproductive in two main ways. It reduces the reach of sporting activity at a time when exercise is seen as crucial to the future health of the population. Sports which are now covered by subscription broadcasters have found their audiences severely diminished and surveys show participation in those sports is suffering.
41. Minority PSB genres such as the arts, science, music, the performing arts, religion and children's television have all suffered from reduced production and broadcasting other than by the BBC. Ways must be found to ensure less popular PSTV genres are delivered by the PSTV ecology as a whole and that the BBC does not become a potentially complacent monopoly provider of any of them.

Reductions on 'quality' – does the UK still make 'the best TV in the world?'

42. In short the answer is a resounding 'Yes!' UK PSTV is the best in the world as many of our members and correspondents who travel and live around the world continually tell us.
43. We see some of the best programmes made abroad. But the range of television in other developed countries around the world pales into insignificance when compared with the quality, quantity and full range of programming and content broadcast in the UK.
44. We are continually told by foreigners that UK TV is their envy and we are mad to think of changing it at all. In particular they say words to the effect that "the BBC is not broken and does not need fixing and should not be messed with".
45. The contribution to the UK's creative industries and UK GDP by our PSTV broadcasters are testament to their value in economic terms.
46. UK PSTV brings the nation together at times of importance and for major events of national significance.

The contribution of non-public service content providers to public service output

47. Some public service output is provided by non PSTV providers. This is mainly news, sport and some drama.
48. Unfortunately this is largely available only to a relatively small audience, usually of subscribers.
49. It is interesting to observe the high spend, major publicity given to some drama productions by non-public service broadcasters. These tend to be feature film quality investments, presumably with a strong marketing agenda.

50. The vast majority of non-public service provider public service output is not indigenous UK material. Thus it has a global reach and nature and global citizenship value; it does not reflect not contribute towards UK citizenship.

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51. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. We look forward to the outcome of your Inquiry. We stand ready to contribute and play our part in a constructive and practical manner in any measures which result from your work.

52. The contact for this submission is:

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