

Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: The work of the BBC, HC 472

Wednesday 20 March 2024

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Dame Caroline Dinenage (Chair); Steve Brine; Clive Efford; Julie Elliott; Damian Green; Dr Rupa Huq; Simon Jupp; John Nicolson; Alex Sobel; Giles Watling.

Questions 1-130

Witnesses

[I](#): Tim Davie CBE, Director-General, BBC, David Jordan, Director, Editorial Policy and Standards, BBC, and Leigh Tavaziva, Chief Operating Officer, BBC.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Tim Davie, David Jordan and Leigh Tavaziva.

Chair: Welcome to this meeting of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. Our session this morning looks at the work of the BBC, following the Government's mid-term review, the licence fee increase and the ongoing funding review. We are joined by Tim Davie, the Director-General, Leigh—sorry how do you pronounce your surname, Leigh?

Leigh Tavaziva: Tavaziva.

Chair: Leigh Tavaziva, who is the chief operating officer. David Jordan is also here; he is the director of editorial policy and standards. You are all welcome. Thank you so much for coming. Leigh, I do apologise—I have an unspellable, unpronounceable surname myself, so that is completely unforgiveable of me.

Before we begin, would any members of the Committee like to declare any interests?

Giles Watling: I am occasionally in receipt of royalties from the BBC.

Simon Jupp: I am a former BBC journalist.

Julie Elliott: I have received hospitality from the BBC at various times over the years.

Damian Green: I am a former BBC employee in various manifestations and, as of yesterday, I chair the BBC all-party parliamentary group.

Chair: Congratulations!

John Nicolson: I am a former BBC reporter and presenter. I worked with David Jordan on many groundbreaking films during my period there, and I have received BBC hospitality more recently.

Steve Brine: The same as Ms Elliott—BBC hospitality occasionally over the years.

Dr Huq: Yes, I went to a BBC gig, and a long time ago—in the '90s—I was on the payroll.

Clive Efford: I'm just a pleb.

Chair: Nonsense! I'm sure I have also received hospitality from the BBC at some point.

Damian Green: Sorry—so have I.

Q1 **Chair:** Now that we have got that off our chests, you are all very welcome; thank you so much for coming.



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Mr Davie, can I start with you? The Secretary of State said that “there is a perception amongst the public that the BBC is biased”. Do you agree with her?

Tim Davie: Overall, if you look at the mid-term review—if I may give just one sentence—I thought the process was extremely well conducted and we support the conclusions. It is a very helpful piece of work.

The mid-term review shows clear evidence that the focus and adherence to impartiality and editorial standards is now at the heart of our priorities and what we have got to deliver. I am proud of our output under huge pressure, and when we look at the data, which we can come to, overall we are doing a good job in delivering impartial coverage amidst enormous pressure.

One of the things I say a lot is that 70% of the world now does not have a free press—the polarisation in society is profound—so for any institution like ourselves to steer the course among the noise and the storms of social media is very demanding. But if you look at the Ofcom research on trust and arguments, we are holding firm in the midst of a situation where public institutions—I worry about this—are losing trust. I believe that we are impartial and doing a good job, but, as people who know me know, I do not for a minute want to be defensive or complacent about that. I think there is lots of work to do.

The other thing I would say is that we focus on the output and the delivery against that. We are not perfect, but I think we are doing a good job. Perception is relevant, but it comes after the delivery of impartiality in our coverage and how we work. Our perception tracking remains strong and we are seen as the No. 1 source for impartial news, but we also have people on either side of the political fence, although I think it gets more complicated as we get into issues where people believe that the BBC is leaning one way or the other.

A final point from me: I think we have got to be considerate and more transparent in explaining our workings, because we are seeing a quite disturbing trend globally where people are constantly trying to ascribe intent. We are getting more evidence—we have talked about this with editorial policy and others—that you can get the same piece of coverage and read it very differently based on where you come from and your echo chamber, so sometimes you are going to have to do even more work to say, “Look, I’m just asking a question to find out what’s happening.” We have got work to do, but overall we are doing a good job.

Q2 **Chair:** What has the mid-term review changed about your view of, and how you manage, impartiality?

Tim Davie: I think it challenges us continually—we can talk about some of the specifics, but it challenges us to be robust in implementing things like the Serota review and our 10-point plan, which are material. If members of the Committee read the thematic review of tax and public spending—we are just about to get to a migration thematic review—it is a really



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interesting read. These are not easy topics, but they are also topics that demand calm, contextualised journalism.

I think we are doing a good job, but there are loads of things in there, if you read that tax and public spending review, that are really useful for journalists. If you were the editor of the "Today" programme—they are very good people, these people, and we get a lot of noise around this and we can talk about it—or, if you talked to the editor of the "Six" and the "Ten", I will not name them all and they are good people and of the highest quality, but sometimes they need to step back and think about it.

What the mid-term review says is: do the thematic reviews and be open-minded about complaints. The BBC has had long-running criticism of auto-defence—that is not my style. I think that we should be listening and reflecting on where we get criticism, and the mid-term review says very clearly that we also need a robust procedure for—we split out, as you know, although we will come on to complaints, I am sure, at some point—the post-broadcast complaints system. We need to make sure that there is increasing trust in it. We need the trust in that, and that is a good challenge from the mid-term review.

Q3 **Chair:** You spoke about the review of migration. What is the status of that one? When is it likely to come forward?

Tim Davie: We are taking it to the board this week. It is subject to approval, but not far away—imminent, in that it has been written, it has been through the editorial guidelines and standards committee, and it will go to the board this week. We are just about there.

Q4 **Chair:** What other reviews do you have planned?

Tim Davie: We are yet to confirm our next big thematic review. We will come back to you. Obviously, we will make it public once we have decided what the topic is. That is being discussed at the moment.

Q5 **Chair:** In October, the BBC board issued a statement on the Israel-Gaza war that referred to a review of the editorial guidelines, which was planned to take place in the spring. Has that taken place?

Tim Davie: Yes. I wonder whether David can give us the detail of where we are with standards.

David Jordan: The reference was to a particular part of the review of the editorial guidelines. People in this room know a lot about reviews of the editorial guidelines, but for the benefit of others: we do this every four or five years. We have a look at the editorial guidelines and whether they are fit for purpose currently.

We review them in terms of changes in the law, changes to the Ofcom code and changes in audience expectations—all those kinds of things. We go through a process each time, which starts with me and my team looking at all the feedback we have had over the previous four to five years about implementing the guidelines. We then update them in relation to that. After we have been through that process and consulted our



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lawyers and, similarly, people in-house, we go to a more general consultation with everybody in the BBC. We are at that point at the moment.

When we have finished doing that—we want those comments in by the end of this month—it will take us a little while to build them into the latest draft. When we have the latest draft, we take it to a public consultation, which will happen in this spring. That will last for six weeks and give an opportunity to everyone. We don't just do that reactively, just putting it on our website and ask people to comment; we proactively send the draft to a lot of stakeholder organisations and, indeed, to political parties and others, and we ask them positively for comment. When we have finished all that process, we obviously take it into account and then take that draft back to the board, which ultimately signs it off. Hopefully, we will do that in the first part of the autumn. When the board has agreed to it, we go on to publish—I hope before we get to the next general election, but you will know more about whether that is likely than I do. So, we have a process, and the bit you are referring to is the public consultation, which is coming up next.

Q6 Chair: Okay, that's fine. Mr Davie, back to my original question. The Secretary of State said, "There is a perception amongst the public that the BBC is biased." Was she being unfair?

Tim Davie: Well, she was sharing a personal perspective. I get a lot of personal perspective. When we look at the overall data on the BBC, the perception on impartiality remains strong. But on either side of a strong score, you also have people who view us as going one way or the other, and we continue to work on that.

Q7 Julie Elliott: I want to come in on the back of the Israel-Gaza coverage. The ICJ hearing several weeks ago was a hugely significant news item. On the channel that has replaced the News Channel, there was hardly any of the South African submission on day one, and yet hours and hours of the Israeli submission on day two. Have you looked into the disaster that that was in terms of impartiality? Because it was not impartial.

Tim Davie: As you know, I get significant feedback from people on either side—

Q8 Julie Elliott: I don't think there are two sides to this. I think there is an issue of impartiality and fairness.

Tim Davie: David may look at it, but we did cover in detail that ruling.

Q9 Julie Elliott: I watched it—all of it.

Tim Davie: On one outlet. We can debate the ins and outs of that, but overall I think we have been pretty robust in covering the ICJ proceedings.

Q10 Julie Elliott: Do you think it was fair to have a tiny bit of the South African submission and then switch to the Post Office, which is a very important story—I am not decrying that—but then have hours and hours the next day of the other side's submission. Do you think that was fair



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and impartial?

Tim Davie: I think on a rolling news channel, in terms of selections and—

Q11 **Julie Elliott:** No, no. Do you think that was fair, impartial and balanced?

Tim Davie: I think that overall, when you look at our coverage on the rulings, we have been in a reasonable position.

Q12 **Julie Elliott:** David, do you think it was fair and impartial? I am talking about the coverage of those two days of hearings, not the rest of the news.

David Jordan: I think you have put your finger on something very important about what happened. It only happened on our UK output. The international output covered the two sides of that conflict.

Q13 **Julie Elliott:** But it didn't here.

David Jordan: On the presentations that were made to the ICJ, they covered them equally in our international coverage. But in our UK coverage, because the hearing on the Post Office was being held at the same time, they made the editorial decision to go with the Post Office coverage rather than the other coverage, which, as you can tell, was a very difficult decision to make.

When News looked at it in retrospect, they did think that perhaps they had made a mistake in not making the two live coverage events similar or the same. But all the other coverage was very similar and the same and was very comprehensive. It was just about the live coverage on the News Channel on those two days, which was not absolutely equivalent. In this particular conflict, if you do not have absolute equivalence, as you know, it leads to people suspecting that you are doing something deliberately to be biased. That is not the case. It was genuinely a difficult editorial decision about which hearing they went with.

Q14 **Julie Elliott:** Do you think it was a mistake to do the coverage in the way that they did?

David Jordan: News have said that if they had thought about it again, they might have done it differently.

Julie Elliott: Thank you.

Q15 **Damian Green:** I want to ask about impartiality. As you will be aware, there have been lots of complaints about specifically the Arabic service and individual journalists who are working for the BBC but also retweeting things that are essentially pro-Hamas. I think you said that there has been a problem there. Have you now eradicated that?

Tim Davie: We have certainly taken action wherever we see something that is not within our guidelines. Obviously, I cannot talk about the individual processes we are going through. The Arabic service output, we should be very proud of. This has been a service since 1938 with 33 million listeners and viewers. It does an extremely good job. One reason



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we are trusted around the world is because of services like that. The individuals themselves, by the way, are under enormous pressure. The threats our journalists face should be put in context. Only in the last two weeks we have found out that the Iranian courts have passed sentences on journalists on our Persian service. We have to set this in context.

Having said that, some of those tweets that we have seen are unacceptable and we have taken action and will continue to take action. Can I commit to you that it will never happen again? Of course not. But we are robust and we are doing the fair thing. We are acting fairly and judiciously. It is not easy. You are seeing it around the world; every news organisation and cultural and political institution is under enormous pressure. This is enormously fraught. But the BBC is steering the course. The answer to your question is: we do not want to see it, and when we see it, we will take action and look at the appropriate sanction. That will not always be leaving the BBC; there are various ways we can take action. We have had people leave the BBC. That is where we are.

Q16 Damian Green: You have had people leave the BBC as a result of stuff they have said?

Tim Davie: Yes. Take the example of the person from BBC Three who is no longer working with us. It is very difficult for me to go into individual cases, but we have had people who are no longer working at the BBC. I want to stop there if I can, because you are into difficult territory with individuals.

Q17 Damian Green: But on this specific issue?

Tim Davie: In terms of social media activity with regard to this issue—yes.

Q18 Damian Green: I am going to move on to a different impartiality matter, and one that is sensitive in a different way but does bear directly on your point about institutions maintaining confidence. It is the Justin Webb case. As you know, the BBC complaints system is quite often longwinded—you do not often get a result quickly—but in his case, when he said that a particular trans woman was male, in the context of international chess of all things, he was almost instantly reprimanded by the executive complaints unit. I have seen reports that he was not even interviewed; he did not even get to put his side of the story to the executive complaints unit. That has excited a lot of people to say, “Hang on. This is a clear sign of institutional bias”, and to suggest that the BBC has, like many other institutions around Whitehall, been infused by the Stonewall ideology and does not treat the other side fairly.

Tim Davie: I will let David speak a little bit about the process, because it is important. I do not think we suffer an institutional bias in this area. It is an area of controversy—fact. It is also an area where we need to have the confidence of our journalists to be able to ask about and discuss the issues, so we do not have no-go areas in the BBC. To do that, we do demand of our journalists to keep within the editorial guidelines, and the



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editorial guidelines are clear in this area. Have a read of them. They are not overly restrictive; they are not on one side of the fence.

The other thing is that we have to be kind and caring in this and listen to people—and be nice. Sorry, that is not really an editorial comment, but for goodness' sake! I read an article this morning that said I was being deluged. I have had under a handful of emails. Let's get real here. This is being whipped up around us in a way that is deeply, deeply damaging to civilised debate about these topics.

Having said that, there are also people who care very deeply on either side of this debate, and we need to hear from them. To do that, we are holding the centre of the ring. That is not much fun at times. That is why I am not on X. I think our journalists are doing a very good job of it, if I may—a really good job. That instance was a foot fault. There was a breach; it was quite a small thing, but it registered. It was just a sentence that was not quite right. We all do that. I think that's what it was, no more, no less. To act on that quickly is the right thing. David, do you want to summarise my comments more technically? That would be helpful.

David Jordan: First of all, in order to avoid being perceived as being biased in any way on this subject, we ceased to have a corporate relationship some time ago, and a long time before many other corporations made the same decisions. We are very, very keen that we report both sides of this debate, which can become quite difficult at times, in as fair a way as is possible to everyone concerned and to all viewpoints. In the case of Justin Webb, it was unfortunate that he did not define his terms a bit more. Had he said "biological male" when he referred, or "born male", there would not have been a problem.

As you know, it is a very sensitive subject for trans women to be called male rather than female. That is part of the debate and we need to steer very carefully through that difficult debate and make sure that we are not offending either side of it and not using terms that are clearly offensive to either side, or seen, to them, to be taking sides in it. Had he talked about "biological male" it would have been fine and there would not have been an issue, but just asserting that all trans women are male is not the BBC's style on this. In December of last year, News produced a long note on reporting sex and gender in which all that is made clear and all our journalists should have been aware of it.

The ECU, as you know in these cases, whether it takes a long or short time—it is certainly not long-winded in its findings—is completely independent of the programme makers in coming to decisions. All it does is look at how that has been done against our guidelines and against our practices, and that is what they did in this case.

Q19 **Damian Green:** I am fascinated because I did not know. So it is completely independent to the extent that it will not hear the point of view of the accused. There are points about natural justice here, aren't there?



David Jordan: It will ask the programme—and it did—for its view of this matter and it was given. Justin's view was represented to the ECU through the "Today" programme in this case. His view was understood and heard, and it was not that it was not taken account of but that a different view was reached by the ECU.

- Q20 **Damian Green:** Okay. I absolutely get the sensitivities and, indeed, the desire to report it in as calm a way as possible. There is a full range of views on this Committee on the issue.

One other aspect, just to clarify: I think I am right that in the case of Scarlet Blake, who committed a terrible murder of a woman and tortured a cat and things like that, the initial report described her as a woman when it was reasonably relevant to the case that she is a trans woman. Is it right that you have apologised for that?

David Jordan: I think we have said that in our initial reporting, not in the whole of our reporting, we should have made clearer what her status was, and we did not in our first reporting of that. It was a court report and the court report throughout used its own terminology, which we adopted, but we should have used our terminology in the BBC. Where those court cases occur, where you are talking about a trans woman who has committed a crime of that sort, we need to make clear what her status was at the time that the crime was committed and what her status is now. We need to make those things clear and we did not make it clear in our initial reporting.

Tim Davie: And the guidelines are clear on this. If you read our guidelines—obviously, we are going through the process of looking at our original guidelines—that report could have been, frankly, better written.

- Q21 **Damian Green:** It is interesting. You have set up this Verify unit, which you are very proud of, and yet something like this can slip through the net. It is part of the Verify unit to say, "Hang on, it may be that what we are getting from sources such as court reports needs—"

Tim Davie: If I may, Verify is about looking at big issues to the outside world. That is about ensuring that thousands of journalists know the editorial guidelines backwards and have the confidence and the training to ensure they get everything right. You and I know that, actually, what we are delivering is nothing short of amazing on a global basis across the many, many journalists who care very deeply. Now and again, in some of the areas we have talked about, you are going to get phraseology that is not quite right. You need to act and you need to say, "We could be better here." That is what we are doing. Simple as that.

As editor-in-chief, my main concern, if I am honest, is that we begin to have a culture where the debates around these things solely migrate to echo chamber, social media-type environments. This is important. We need to fight for this, because otherwise we are going to spend all our time talking about one out of 20,000 instances, whereas what I am interested in is preserving, from a societal point of view, an ability to bring together people to talk about these things. If we do not fight for that and



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solely focus on the fringes, we are essentially feeding a particular narrative. I am quite animated about it at the moment, as you can hear, because I worry about it.

- Q22 **Damian Green:** Okay. Well, I will step back to look for the bigger picture. Samir Shah said when he was before us that the BBC needs to be “match fit” for the general election. If you think things are sensitive now, just wait until the run-up for that. Are you match fit for it yet?

Tim Davie: Can’t wait—I think we are very trim; we are ready to go. But we await an announcement. David can talk in detail about the editorial policies, but the one thing that this institution has is a lot of history of navigating the course, in terms of all of the demands of a general election. But, no, we are here to serve and ready to go.

- Q23 **Damian Green:** Who is going to present it?

Tim Davie: Well, we will never tell you that until we know that there is an election, or when it’s coming. We do not reveal our line-up until the fixture is in the diary. That is where we are.

- Q24 **Damian Green:** You have already referred to the differences of international coverage of the ICJ hearing internationally and on the domestic News Channel. Does the merger of those channels make the general election coverage more difficult?

Tim Davie: I can take this. As you will have heard from Deborah Turness and others, the structure of that is that we have one organisation, but we can do UK opt-outs and UK streams, so, frankly, I don’t think that there is any issue. We will be able to opt out. The other thing is, let’s be honest about it: in terms of scale, I love linear news channels to bits, but they are not where it’s happening. The vast numbers are going to be in the big BBC One broadcasts and online. That is where it is going to be, but I don’t see any issue with the News Channel, no.

David Jordan: The critical thing for us, whatever the output is—whether it is online, on TV or on radio, and whether it is in the UK or internationally—is that it is impartial. And, for that purpose, as you know, for every election that is held in the UK the BBC produces a specific set of election guidelines. There is a set on the editorial guidelines website at the moment that relates to the elections that start today, I think, for the Greater London Assembly and the London Mayor—the election period for that starts today—and next week for the rest of the elections in England and the police and crime commissioner elections. There is a set of election guidelines that apply to those.

I already have in front of me a set of draft election guidelines for the upcoming general election—just in relation to your “match fitness”—but we cannot put the finishing touches to that until Ofcom produces its guidance paper about how much coverage should be allocated to each of the parties, which it does before each election that takes place in the UK these days. We then base the coverage that we allocate on Ofcom’s recommendations in that paper, and on their findings in relation to



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previous electoral history, the number of seats that people are fighting—which I call the ambition—and also opinion poll ratings. All of those things get taken into account. We then—this is the critical, most difficult part—make sure that all of our output everywhere is impartial, and that we give the appropriate coverage to all of the parties standing in the election.

- Q25 **Dr Huq:** One barometer that people have for impartiality is the panels that you see on “Question Time”. And, for the last four years that figures are available for, apparently there were 28 panellists from non-dom or foreign-owned, overseas, billionaire-owned media outlets. There were 28 of those and only six from centrist or centre-left outlets—I am counting from *Private Eye* to *Daily Mirror*, *Novara* and Vice Media. Doesn’t that look massively unbalanced?

David Jordan: I am sorry to say that I am totally unaware of that data and where it has come from, so I would be very interested to see it. All I know is that the “Question Time” team, which is incredibly expert in this, spends a lot of time spinning a lot of plates in the air to try to make sure that its panels are gender representative, ethnically diverse, geographically disparate, socio-economically representative and politically representative of all of the different political parties in the country—plus, all kinds of other factors that weigh into its decision about who is on the panels, quite apart from whether the people concerned are actually good at being on panels. All of those factors are taken into account on a weekly basis, and, over time, the “Question Time” team aspires to get a genuinely representative range of people, with all sorts of different views, on its panel.

I am not aware of that piece of analysis, but I am very happy to have a look at it and see whether there is any inherent bias in what they are doing. All I can say is that they struggle incredibly hard. They have some advice from my chief adviser on politics on this. They struggle incredibly hard to make sure that the panel is representative.

Tim Davie: They also look at the long-term data. It is worth us looking at the data in the round, because that is 34 people out of a lot. We need to have a look at it in the round. I do not want to dismiss the data, but I am just saying to David’s point, if you talk to the “Question Time” team—I and others have been down there talking, and many of you will have had the pleasure—they work extremely hard on a data-based approach. I am more than happy to look at that.

- Q26 **Dr Huq:** I have more figures from that same year of 2022-23. There were six trade unionists—people who represent millions and millions of working people—but 13 businesspeople. You see the man from Sainsbury’s and the man from Iceland pop up every week, but six trade unionists only—it does not look right.

Again, you mentioned political balance. The Green party is in power in Scotland, and has one MP in this place. I am sure we do not see them as often as the 35 appearances Nigel Farage has done. Tice comes on a lot. They are called Reform now, aren’t they? It feels like they are quite a



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regular fixture, but they have never had anyone actually elected to Parliament. Do you know what I mean? It feels like they have a lot of airtime from you guys.

David Jordan: You are talking about the number of appearances by Nigel Farage over a very long period of time. If you totalled up all the Green party appearances over that same period of time, I am sure it would come to a significant number as well. I think you have to be really careful about comparing apples with apples and pears with pears here, and making sure that you have the right sorts of comparisons. But I am very happy to take the figures to "Question Time" and ask them whether they have managed to fulfil their requirements.

- Q27 **Dr Huq:** People watching do notice. Melanie Phillips was on the other week; she has been on 28 times. I think Piers Morgan—people like that—has been on 23 times. I know you want shock jock people for a bit of value who say something controversial, but still, in your charter you have educate, inform, entertain. That would be worth taking away and looking at.

David Jordan: If you have data that I or the "Question Time" team have not seen, we would certainly be happy to take it to the "Question Time" team and ask them to talk about it. If necessary, we could even drop you a line and explain where they are coming from.

- Q28 **Dr Huq:** Okay. There is another case that popped up this week. They are now called Reform UK, but their previous incarnation was as UKIP. David Cameron called UKIP "a bunch of fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists". They are now called Reform UK; their one MP was not elected, having lost the Conservative Whip for Islamophobic conspiracy outbursts, which he would not apologise for. This week, you have to had to apologise for calling them far-right. How much pressure were you under to do that, and from who? Because it is not from Ofcom. A lot of people would say that some of their candidates—

Tim Davie: I don't think far-right is the right label—full stop. That is our judgment, editorially. We may have different views on it, but I do not think it is the right label. In terms of pressure, we did have a few complaints, but we reflect on it ourselves. These are editorial judgments. My personal view is that you have got to be a bit careful with far-left and far-right, with parties that carry quite a lot of support.

- Q29 **Dr Huq:** Where would you place them on the spectrum? Some of the statements from some of their candidates are quite alarming. *The Guardian* said they are a haven for conspiracy theorists and extremists. They are a social democrat party in all but name, but they are against international law. That is a benchmark of civilised society.

Tim Davie: I understand, but with respect, if we judged our labels by individual quotes from Members, I think that would be an interesting strategy in itself. They are clearly a party on the right of politics. I just think that if you get into far-left or far-right descriptors—and we will behave fairly on this—you end up in the wrong territory.



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Q30 Dr Huq: Is it pressure from them? They complained a lot, and then you backed down with this grovelling apology?

Tim Davie: We got complaints, but if you think we just respond under pressure on that, that is not how we work—we consider.

Q31 Dr Huq: It looks like it.

Tim Davie: It may, but I am just telling you how it works. I understand the concern, and these are judgments, but my view is that we made the right call on saying that is not the right label.

Q32 Dr Huq: I know that in 2021, James Wild MP said there were not enough Union Jacks in your annual review. That was pilloried at the time.

Tim Davie: I remember—it was one of my only social media hits where it was largely a positive experience for me.

Q33 Dr Huq: In the 268-page annual report, he did not like the lack of Union Jacks. I am glad you have not backed down in some respects, but you could be a bit—

Tim Davie: Sorry, I am lost on the comment. I just want to understand it, so that I can respond.

Q34 Dr Huq: I don't know who is pressuring you. It seems a bit odd that you are backing down—

Tim Davie: With respect, I love this job, but the pressure is ferocious from every side. This is a more polarised time. I have talked about this. Everyone wants to ascribe intent. There are people who think we have got an agenda to the right, an agenda to the left. We are woke warriors on one side and small c conservatives on the other. You can go and meet the editors of programmes like "Question Time". I am fiercely proud of them, because what they are trying to do is calmly get this right. This is not an agenda—

Q35 Dr Huq: I will send you those figures—

Tim Davie: Sorry—they are very helpful. We should have those figures and they are useful for the "Question Time" team. They will take them in the right spirit. I am just saying that we are trying to make a judgment that can be applied fairly across the board. By the way, I have had incoming on every side on "Question Time"—

Q36 Dr Huq: Or Laura Kuenssberg or any of those programmes. They have three talking heads and two leavers and a journalist or something. People do notice this. I will send you some hard facts on this. It looks like you are being leant on. The whole point of the mid-term review—

Tim Davie: I want to make it clear that we are not being leant on.

Dr Huq: Okay, I am just saying how it is seen.

Tim Davie: I am telling you as Director-General that we are not being leant on in that way. We are open-minded to complaints. When complaints



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come in, we reflect on them and go, "Are we in the right place?" We have smart people to do that. As you know, we have split it—David's job focuses very much on pre-broadcast and Peter Johnston has come to that in terms of the complaints system. It is very strong. They are very wise people and they are thinking through these issues. We do not make decisions based on the strength of people leaning on us. We are a fiercely independent, without fear or favour broadcaster. That is what we stand for. Anyone who says differently is factually incorrect. That is not to say we are not immune from people's views. You reflect on it. It is not being weak to think through something if someone raises an issue; it is just sensible.

Q37 Dr Huq: Do you have any comment on these stories? After forcing out people from the News Channel and splitting, you are going to reverse everything you did. In the merger a lot of people lost their jobs and now you are going to do an about-turn and have separate channels for world and domestic again. That was in *The Telegraph*. Is there any truth in that?

Tim Davie: We always said that we would balance the different streams and ops and we continually make changes, but on the overall move to one news channel, there are risks with that—to the earlier question—when you have a big domestic story. We might well touch on funding. We have had our budget cut by 30% in the 10 years to 2020, so you can't do everything. I care about these things, but we had to make some changes. We are not rowing back. We will make adjustments editorially as we go.

Q38 Dr Huq: A last one from me. The Gary Lineker review or whatever it was, the John Hardie review—

Tim Davie: The John Hardie review.

Q39 Dr Huq: On the social media output.

Tim Davie: There was only one person writing that review, to be clear. I know there has been speculation on that.

Q40 Dr Huq: Not the mid-term review, but that specific one.

Tim Davie: Yes, the social media review by John Hardie.

Q41 Dr Huq: What has changed practically?

Tim Davie: I think we are doing well. I know everyone has their view on "what about that tweet"? I honestly think we are doing very well based on what I see around the world. I mean, 20,000 people. Yes, we have issues to deal with.

By the way, when the Committee asked me whether I would continue to have issues in social media, I said, "Absolutely". When you have 20,000 people with different accounts and this, that and the other, you are going to have some exceptions and things going on. But when I look monthly at our reports on thousands of journalists and how they are behaving, and also across the BBC, I think we are in pretty good shape.



Q42 Dr Huq: Are you confident it can withstand a general election?

Tim Davie: Yes, I think it can—but do I think I am going to be picking up the paper and not reading about anything in the next year? Only in my dreams. This is an area we are constantly going to have to manage. You have the freelance community and others. I feel very strongly that, remember, the guidelines are tight for news journalists and factual programming, and I have to say they are doing an outstanding job and I thank all of them. Local journalists, who have been through a lot with all the things going on, behave brilliantly. I think it is working very well.

Q43 Alex Sobel: Just a quick follow-up from the middle of Rupa's pack of questions: if you describe the Conservative party as a centre-right party and the Labour party as centre-left, how would you describe Reform and the Workers Party, both of which have a Member of Parliament?

Tim Davie: They are on the right and the left of politics—that is all I need to go to.

Q44 Clive Efford: To follow up on some of your answers, you have said, "We're doing well," several times in answer to some of the questions. Is there anything you would like to tell us about that is not going well?

Tim Davie: How long have you got?

Clive Efford: You are here to be scrutinised.

Tim Davie: Absolutely; we have loads of work to do. If you look at the mid-term review, we still get to 94% of people a month, and that is very good, but in a hyper-competitive market there are certain sections of society that get less value from the BBC. In direct answer to your question, we need to work harder on that. We could talk about across the UK, where I feel that in some parts of the UK we are not delivering as much value as we could to people, because we could be doing more work locally and producing more. We are in the midst of that, so we can improve there.

Now and again, we make journalistic mistakes—they are low in number, but you've got to constantly learn, like the ones we talked about earlier. Of course we can improve there.

There is plenty to do, and institutions have to be properly questioning of themselves on groupthink. That is one reason I like pushing major areas of news outside London. For the first time, you can become a network news editor without coming to London. That is major. It is subtle, but it shapes the output, because you think differently. If you look at the quality of breakfast television, for instance, it has a slightly different flavour coming from Salford.

We can keep improving. We can get our batting averages up: our return on our commissions and our return on investment have to be outstanding, versus the Netflixes and the Primes, because they have much bigger pockets. Our commissioning teams are the best in the world in terms of return on investment, but they can do better. We can grow our



commercial arm—we can talk about that. The list is long and I remain healthily dissatisfied in that regard.

- Q45 **Clive Efford:** I think somebody else might be asking questions about the growth of the commercial arm. Since the mid-term review, what have you done to strengthen your complaints procedures?

David Jordan: As you know, the mid-term review made a number of recommendations in relation to the complaints process. One of them was to change our agreement so that the board is specifically responsible not just for creating the framework within which we handle complaints, but for the process of handling them on a day-to-day, week-to-week basis.

The mid-term review also made some other recommendations in relation to governance; the Director-General has already referred to one of them, which was splitting up my role so that there is now a director of complaints and reviews who is responsible for all the post-broadcast issues that arise with programmes, and I am responsible for things that happen before broadcast, for advice that goes into programmes before that, from an editorial policy direction, and have other responsibilities too.

It also recommended greater oversight of the complaints process by the editorial guidelines and standards committee of the board, and that independent members of that board have a greater role in overseeing the complaints process and being responsible for it. The review made a number of recommendations in relation to Ofcom: one was that they should review all of the ECU upheld findings and ensure that they were satisfied that that was as far as was needed.

The basis on which written online material is complained about at the third stage has been changed. There is a rather peculiar process at the moment, which involves Ofcom giving an opinion of any written online material appealed to it in relation to the BBC's editorial guidelines. In future, they will deal with it in exactly the same way as they deal with video and audio material, which will strengthen the process for dealing with complaints about written online material.

The review has also made a number of recommendations about how we increase—for both the BBC and Ofcom—awareness of the BBC First system and the knowledge that complainants have of their ability to appeal at different stages of that complaints process. I suspect we are the only corporation in the land that has a video explaining to people how they can complain to us.

The mid-term review liked that, but it wanted us to go beyond that in telling people how they can complain, so we will do some more work on publicising our process and making sure that people understand it. It also wanted us to improve some aspects of the way in which we respond to complaints and to be a little less defensive about some of our responses at what is called stage 1B. There were a whole range of things, all of which we are doing, and some of which we had already done and put into practice during the course of the discussions with the DCMS about the



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mid-term review.

- Q46 Clive Efford:** As MPs, we all have a lot of experience of dealing with big corporations' complaints procedures. You are not the only one, I can assure you—look at PALS in the NHS. That is all well and good about the procedure, but are we assessing the actual people who are complaining, their experience and how they feel about the process?

David Jordan: As part of Ofcom's review of the BBC's complaints process—which happened a little while ago—it did something called a mystery shopping exercise. Basically, that involved it making complaints through the process—

Clive Efford: Are you making a programme about that?

David Jordan: We didn't make a programme about that, no, but Ofcom did that and came up with some findings, some of which have now been reflected in the recommendations of the mid-term review. We know that it will do another of those exercises, basically going through the whole process a large number of times to see how well we deal with the complaints that come in that it has given to us, as opposed to members of the audience. There is therefore a way of testing the process in a sensible way that gives us good feedback and helps us to improve our system. That is what Ofcom is interested in, as our regulator.

- Q47 Clive Efford:** I heard the exchange earlier with my colleague Julie Elliott about the coverage of Gaza. How many complaints have you had about that?

David Jordan: As of this morning, we have had just under 4,000 people complaining that our output and coverage were biased against Israel, and over 4,000 that they were biased in favour—about 4,200. Those were the complaints as of this morning, roughly those numbers, so they are pretty similar, which I think reflects the division of opinion in the country as a whole on that issue. Those are rolling totals, from 7 October onwards.

Tim Davie: I would also say that it is a fair pushback when people say—I think this is important in terms of the pressure—that that is just the number of complaints. There are different sizes of communities, different views, all those things, so it is not that the BBC is sitting there going, "Oh look, we have the same number of complaints, and therefore we're in the right place." We have to listen and, to the earlier comments, there are some things that we reflect on and go, "Okay, we could've done better there", on every side of this very difficult and traumatic situation. The complaints are useful context; I don't think that they are any more than that.

- Q48 Clive Efford:** Yes, but if we take the broad figures just relating to Gaza, or specific items that generate a great deal of concern, they might highlight something other than just a balance of numbers. For example, coverage of the court proceedings in South Africa might have generated a great deal of criticism on one side—

Tim Davie: Exactly right.



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David Jordan: In situations like that, when we get large numbers of complaints about a specific issue, we will obviously look at that very carefully. Usually, those get to our executive complaints unit, and it will make a ruling about whether what we did was fair as well.

Q49 **Clive Efford:** May I ask you quickly about whistleblowing? You have published your new procedures for that. Are people coming forward? Are they using that system? How would you assess its success or whether it is working?

Leigh Tavaziva: We have a very clear whistleblowing policy, which we have had in place for a number of years, and we have just refreshed it to extend what it covers, including editorial serious malpractice as well. We think that is really important. That was part of the feedback that we have had. It is well publicised within the BBC, but also externally, so you could google the BBC's whistleblowing policy and find out exactly what it is and how to access it.

It obviously operates within a whistleblowing framework. We also continue to provide training to our teams and our leaders to help ensure that people know how to access the whistleblowing process. It is clearly a confidential environment and a way to raise a complaint. You can raise it internally inside the BBC, but you can also use entirely independent third parties to raise a whistleblowing complaint. You can choose to remain anonymous, as many of our whistleblowers do, or not.

At the moment we have about 21 open whistleblowing cases—we tend to run around 20, 30 or 40 whistleblowing cases. We think that it is well managed and publicised. We have a whistleblowing champion in our senior independent director Sir Nicholas Serota as well, who plays a very significant role in helping us to assess our whistleblowing decisions.

Q50 **Clive Efford:** Thanks for that. I am going to ask about being election ready and about bias. Members of your board have been quite controversial in the past and have been accused of being politically partial—Sir Robbie Gibb springs to mind, and he has just been given another four-year term on your board. Is there a set of guidelines for members of the board on impartiality during a general election to ensure that there is no interference? It just seems strange, because, if you remember, one of the accusations was that he went and berated members of the "Newsnight" team. During an election period that would not be appropriate, would it? Is there a set of guidelines there so that these people remain impartial?

David Jordan: Our guidelines apply to output, so we are focused on making sure that everything we do—

Q51 **Clive Efford:** Well, isn't he trying to influence output?

David Jordan: First, he was invited to "Newsnight".

Clive Efford: We can argue about that.



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David Jordan: There is not an argument. It is just true that he was invited. "Berated" is a choice of word that not everybody would use. He had a discussion with them about the delivery of "Newsnight" and the delivery of impartiality. There is a code of conduct that applies to all non-executive directors on the board.

Q52 **Clive Efford:** Forgive me, but is it his role to go down there and talk to them about delivery? Is that what he is on the board for?

David Jordan: No, but there isn't anything in the way that the board is constructed as a unitary board that says that members of the board or non-executive directors on the board cannot speak to programmes if programmes wish it. There is nothing that says that, so it is not an offence against the governance of the BBC to do that. Of course, you then might judge what the conversation was about, and so on and so forth—I was not there—but that is not in principle an offence against the governance of the BBC with a unitary board.

Q53 **Clive Efford:** To go back to my original question, is there some guidance for them during the period of a general elections when it will be hypersensitive?

Tim Davie: There is a clear code of conduct. To directly answer your question, we do not have specific guidelines during an election, because I think this is ongoing in terms of the pressures on board members in the BBC. I think we are ferociously clear on it. There is a lot of noise around it. If any of you are appointed to a board decision on the BBC, you are overseeing the executive and you hold us to account in delivering the editorial guidelines.

The idea that you couldn't go and visit a programme or not have an opinion is ridiculous. I think the editors, and Deborah Turness who is running News, are very clear that we are editorially independent, and we are accountable to the board in terms of delivery on the editorial guidelines, but we are the ones making the editorial decisions. I think we are strong enough to do that. I think, mercifully, the BBC board is constructed differently from some of the other public service broadcasters—which have far more political influence, by the way. We have a chair who can act independently. Frankly, we are very clear on what the roles are.

The idea that people cannot have views is one thing, but I think it is very clear and you have to reinforce it. It is not about one board director or whatever. You are getting so much pressure, if I put you in charge of one of our main news streams, that you have to be very clear on what you are delivering against, which is the editorial guidelines, and who you report to editorially, which is the news management, into me. That is how it works, and we are responsible for the output.

There will always be things offstage. The point I would make is, if we have an issue, let's raise it in terms of the output, because that is really what I am focused on, and what Deborah Turness and the other people running the newsroom are responsible for.



- Q54 Giles Watling:** Like most people in this room, it would seem, I too once worked for the BBC. I have seen many changes over the years, and I sometimes worry about the direction the corporation is travelling in. I am a big fan of the BBC, but there have been financial pressures over the years and I am worried about selling off the family silver.

First, I would like to speak about the BBC Singers. A decision was made about a year ago to close the BBC Singers. As we know, they had a major success just recently with Sir Simon Rattle at the Proms, and that decision has been looked at again after representations from many people. This is the BBC Singers' centenary year—they were founded in 1924. What is the future? How do you see this very valuable asset that the BBC possesses being sustained financially?

Tim Davie: We have committed to the long-term of the Singers; they are secure, and that is good news. By the way, I have talked to Sir Simon and the Singers, and I think the quality of the work is outstanding, unique, precious. But, as you know, we had enormous financial challenges with the performing groups to make the numbers work.

The answer to your question is that the Singers are secure. That is great news. That has been helped by a partnership with VOCES8, who are helping us. We won't be going to a different area and selling the family silver; I am never going to sell the family silver, but this allows you to do a little more commercial exploitation, in the way that things such as the Concert Orchestra have done.

- Q55 Giles Watling:** So I can take away from this that the future of the BBC Singers is secure.

Tim Davie: You can definitely take that away. We have the partnership, and that is where we are—we are in a good position.

- Q56 Giles Watling:** Moving on, the BBC orchestras are another piece of the family silver—very valuable and very successful. What is the future there?

Tim Davie: I am a big supporter. As you know, I managed audio and music and I cherish the orchestras. Again, we believe in all the orchestras. With our current funding, you can never talk about the long, long, long term on these things, but under my tenure the orchestras are incredibly precious and very valuable. I could go through every one and talk about what they are doing in terms of their repertoire, how they act within the creative economy—

- Q57 Giles Watling:** Again, I can take away from this that the orchestras are secure.

Tim Davie: I think there have been questions—I am just being very direct—about how many people you have, how many people are on staff, how many people you have as freelancers and all those things. What we have been able to do—and orchestra tax relief has really helped us on this; I could bore on at some length on the orchestras, but I will stop



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myself—is say that there will be no compulsory redundancies in the orchestras. We are always looking at exactly the right number of—

Q58 **Giles Watling:** Are you saying, then, that there is a certain shrinkage that we have to accept in the BBC orchestras?

Tim Davie: I think there is a valid question about just how many people you have on staff versus how many people you bring in as performing musicians. What I am saying is that all the orchestras are secure, funding is secure and we are in a position where we can guarantee no compulsory redundancies. Also, I do not want to be in the position of taking any of those performing groups to a point where they cannot deliver the breadth of repertoire that we need. I really think we are in a good place.

Q59 **Giles Watling:** I will take that away as sort of fairly good news.

Tim Davie: It is good news; I don't think you need to caveat it.

Q60 **Giles Watling:** Going back to the family silver and the overarching direction of travel at the BBC, we all remember the days of the BBC rehearsal room—fondly known as the Acton Hilton—

Dr Huq: Long live Acton!

Giles Watling: I think there were 18 different studios in which we rehearsed, and there was a canteen at the top. There was amazing cross-fertilisation of talent in that building—I remember it personally. A decision was made, and the building sort of closed down, but then came back in 2007. Now it has gone and it is going to be flats, so we know what is happening to the Acton Hilton. Have we thrown away something really valuable there?

Tim Davie: Are you talking about Acton?

Giles Watling: I am talking about the Acton Hilton decision and the direction of travel of the BBC. There are issues now about selling off Elstree, selling off the “EastEnders” set and so on. That seems to be a general trend of travel that has been going on for 30 years now. It feels to me that the BBC might be losing some of its essence.

At the Acton Hilton—I have just made a short list—there were shows like “Dad’s Army”, “Fawlty Towers” and “Absolutely Fabulous”. All those people were working in the same building, with the same cross-fertilisation of talent. I personally moved from one programme to another, because I was there with the writers and the directors, who were all in the same place. I absolutely understand the economies of people rehearsing in village halls all over the place, and farming out a lot of that, but we have lost something valuable that the BBC uniquely had, and I am frightened that we are going further down that line. Do you have anything to say to that?

Tim Davie: I think I can reassure you. No one cares about that more than me. When you walk round some of the old studios, you feel the magic of what the BBC is. I know I am in danger here, because I am quite obsessed by the golden past of the BBC—



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Giles Watling: Marmaduke Hussey.

Tim Davie: Exactly right. If you go to Broadcasting House now, it is a fizzing buzz, with the radio theatre, Radio 2 and Radio 1 there. It is great; there is loads of creative energy coming through that building. I thought you were going somewhere different. We can talk about Elstree—I think there is a technical thing about who owns the site, but we are going to protect “EastEnders”, and I think we are fine on that. The key is protecting the creative output there.

I thought you were going to mention Maida Vale. One of the things on the list of all the things that I worry about—those factors you are talking about—is, being very open with you, the special sauce that is Maida Vale 3. I was in there the other day for Radio 2’s “Piano Room”. We have made a decision, because the cost of redeveloping Maida Vale was off the scale. Taking and developing the east London site, London Docklands, is very exciting. It is going to be one of those buildings you are talking about, to your earlier point—you will have orchestras, singers and other things going on.

Q61 **Giles Watling:** Tim, you have brilliantly steered me away from the visual arts of the BBC to the radio side of things. I am still talking about the—

Tim Davie: Where is the threat to the visual arts? In fact, I am seeing production bases. I would say one thing, which is that the market has moved radically in terms of owned and operated studio businesses. To be blunt, I do not want to spend money on property when I can spend it on content. So there is that tension there, but if you look at what we have in Pacific Quay, or in other areas, we are still doing our work and developing that. I do not see this. I think we can be incredibly proud of what we have done. Look at Roath Lock in Wales.

Q62 **Giles Watling:** But look at “Doctors”, which is being axed.

Tim Davie: That is a very interesting story in the west midlands. “Doctors” has done a fantastic job, but it is about prioritising our money, and about titles that work, give most audience and give most delivery against our corporate purposes. When I look at the plan for the west midlands, I am incredibly excited. If you go to visit Digbeth—and I really recommend that the Committee go—it is amazing. We have Steven Knight there, developing the studios. We are taking “MasterChef”, four strands, with Endemol Shine up there—130 jobs. We have absolutely committed, with the regional Mayor and the city council. We have done an enormous amount of work.

Q63 **Giles Watling:** So career and talent pathways are still available.

Tim Davie: That is the biggest worry I have with “Doctors”, by the way. Without a doubt, “Doctors” has provided enormous routes for lots of writers. Soaps do that. We have a problem in the market, which is that soaps are not getting the audience they once were. That is just a fact. On jobs and careers pathways, there are a couple of things I would mention. One is that it is important to have ongoing strands, not just two parts



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floating in and out. That is what Steven Knight is doing in terms of building the studio. Also, "MasterChef" has four strands, so it is permanent work; it is not just floating people in for 12 weeks.

So the answer to your question is that I am concerned about it. I could spend an enormous amount of time talking about the work we have done in terms of creative industry clusters and how we are trying to develop those career pathways. I got a question earlier about improvement. One thing we can improve, and we may well touch on this, is making sure the industry remains—we have done a lot of work, and I am proud of it—truly open to all and making sure those pipelines are in place. That is a real challenge.

- Q64 **Giles Watling:** I worry, though, that the BBC, which was the gold standard for career pathways in broadcasting, is losing its centre. One of those points is the removal of the director's course many years ago. One in particular, Peter Howitt, came through the BBC director's course and went on to become a major Hollywood director. The BBC used to do those things, and I worry about general shrinking—not over the past five or 10 years, but over the past 30 years.

Tim Davie: That is a very valid worry, but if you look at our record, we are pushing on apprentices. I am the one that says we need to bring apprentices into the BBC. We have over 800. It is amazing. We are developing those careers. This is really important. I will get back to funding, but if you take 30% out, and you take out the money over the last few years, you cannot grow the organisation. We have had to painfully reduce the amount of people in public service BBC.

What I hope we can do is keep a couple of things. One is the special sauce you were talking about, creatively and in terms of those spaces—that is critical. The second is the career pathways. But we have done a huge amount of work on apprentices—Leigh can talk about that as well. It is very important to us. I do not think we are losing that.

By the way, our role as the catalyst for the creative industry's growth and developing those careers—things such as forming apprentice hubs in areas like the west midlands—is as critical as it has ever been. In fact, we are more valuable than we have ever been.

- Q65 **Giles Watling:** This is my last question, Chair. Even taking the cuts we have seen, and perhaps looking at potential new models of funding for the BBC in order to maintain its gold standard, do you feel that under your watch the BBC is not shrinking, but growing?

Tim Davie: Absolutely. That is a big question, in terms of where you take the answer. There are big questions for the next charter in terms of overall revenues and what we are doing with corporate. Under this period, we are absolutely prioritising careers and making sure that the creative spaces we have are protected. That is essential. It is our special sauce. You're at it—I agree with you.

- Q66 **Simon Jupp:** Good morning. Thanks for coming in. I want to talk about



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BBC local radio—surprise, surprise. BBC Radios Devon, Cornwall, Cambridgeshire, Solent, Tees and London have lost between 19,000 and 50,000 listeners, according to the most recent audience research from RAJAR. Some made marginal gains across the network, but overall, this looks like managed decline. Is it?

Tim Davie: I hope not. As you know, the truth is that if you step above even the discussions we have had on local radio within the BBC, there is massive pressure on linear radio listening and massive pressure on local linear services. There is no doubt about that. If you look, the long-term declines are worrying. We have to work all we can, and if you talk to the editors of those stations—I've been out and about in a number of locations recently—they are all utterly committed to making sure that their local radio services are doing all they can to mitigate radio losses.

I would say—and you know where I am going—that alongside that, we were right to reprioritise some of the money within an overall flat budget to drive digital local provision. That is important. While we have seen pressure on local radio—and we have to see how the changes flow out, by the way, and learn from that; that RAJAR data was a bit early, and the teams are doing amazing work under enormous pressure—what we are seeing in online news locally is rapid growth. I am very proud that I get my local news on the main news app on my phone. That is a major breakthrough if you are a local journalist. It is great news. We are up over 20% on the quarter in terms of online local news.

As you know, we are also recruiting 130 journalists into local, and forming the investigative network with 70 of them, which gives a real chance to get in and grow local. I still absolutely want to deliver on aggressive and punchy local targets. What we can do in local radio—

Q67 **Simon Jupp:** What are your aggressive, punchy targets for BBC local radio? We know that local radio has declined considerably in the last 10 years, including before you made those changes. But how sustainable is that scale of decline? If you continue to see losses like that, how long is it until you just switch the transmitters off?

Tim Davie: I think we are way away from that. The target is not just local radio. If I put you in charge of a region of the BBC and you know it well, your target from me and through the team is, "Can you ensure that 50% of the population are getting local content regularly from the BBC?" That is the big battle. Within that, we know that local radio reaches, on average, around 15% of the population. It is precious to them. I would like us to hold those numbers while growing and making sure we sustain 50% reach.

Q68 **Simon Jupp:** How is morale among BBC local radio staff? Because of the process you went through, we saw some tearful goodbyes and very upset audiences who were majorly disrupted. The schedule of various radio stations is completely different from before, with some very well-known local names up and down the country suddenly losing their jobs by some recruitment process that no one quite understood because it wasn't



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particularly clear, and it appeared to be different in different regions as to the questions that were asked and the way that people were appointed. What is morale like? You have done a tour of different regional—

Tim Davie: Sorry, a tour sounds rather grand. In my day to day, I am out in the regions quite a lot. Recently, I have been—

Simon Jupp: I realise that. So you have been speaking to staff—

Tim Davie: I have been speaking directly to staff at the desk. By the way, these are just snapshots. Look, I think morale is mixed. It has been really—

Simon Jupp: Is “mixed”—

Tim Davie: I am trying not to lurch into management euphemism. What I am trying to say is that I think the teams have been through an enormous amount. That change is incredibly painful. Actually, 75% of the presenters who applied did get jobs. The BBC is a caring employer. It tries to minimise compulsory redundancy. There is a balance here between managing those types of processes and what in my old world a commercial company might do via an email, if I am being blunt. I prefer a caring way of managing our transition and change, but that is very stressful for people as they go through it. I totally recognise that. It has been very difficult, and it has put us under enormous pressure. There are people who care desperately about their output and they are doing a good job; it has never been a criticism of them.

Q69 **Simon Jupp:** What lessons have you learned from that process, then? From a listener’s point of view, it involved an elongated process with tearful goodbyes and an awful lot of upset. What would you do differently if you had to do it again?

Tim Davie: I think the process has been well managed, but I think I would reflect on how long you need to calmly get through those processes and how long that takes. I do think, however, as a media organisation—and everyone is going through it—we are going to go through change. This is about moving 10% of the funding to digital, and it is the right thing to do. The other thing I see on the ground is—and, you know, these are glimmers. I know there will be people going, “Don’t you understand how”—we do. It has really been very tough.

The reason I use the word “mixed”, and I genuinely believe that to be right, is that on the ground you are also seeing journalists who, by virtue of connecting up the multimedia offer and allowing investigative reporting to go into online and not just sit on radio, are really opening up the reach we can get for our stories. This isn’t about young people. It is nothing to do with the lurch to youth. If we look at 60-year-olds, most of their news is consumed online. We have to be there. That is the balance. I do see people beginning, when they see a 22% increase in online stories—that’s a quarter. And I think digital also offers a—

Q70 **Simon Jupp:** But that’s cold comfort to people of an older generation who



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loved and listened to their BBC local radio station as a friend and now hear a voice from miles away with a disconnect from their local community. That is the difference. I understand the move to online. I have seen, in my region, a huge growth in online local stories, which is welcome, but I have also witnessed programmes that sound distant, because they are distant. They don't have the same connection with that audience, which has, because of changes to other networks that you run, including national services, very few places to go.

Tim Davie: That audience is utterly precious. As you know, we have tried to keep 39 breakfast shows, where the vast majority of the listening and the reach is. Yes, the 20 shows in the afternoon is a compromise, but if you have a fixed budget, you're going to have to make choices. I think, actually, that we are being quite nuanced. It has been very tough, but we absolutely have tried to protect good services. I have talked to some of the presenters who are doing the shared shows. There is compromise there, but they are brilliant people. They can make connections with listeners. We have very good people doing it.

I think, actually, that we are in pretty good shape in terms of some of the offers that I am seeing now. It has been painful; it has been a question of compromise. Would I like a budget that can grow and do all these things? I would.

The other thing I would say is that, on digital products—we probably don't talk enough about it sometimes—but the rewiring of the BBC is huge and it massively helps local. What do I mean by that? Putting local stations on Sounds, putting content on Sounds—all those things. There is then a bigger conversation: "Look, we know that for many, often older, people, this is their lifeline. This is their companionship and their connection. But we also have to open up the digital world to as many people as possible, and that is what we should be doing."

Q71 **Simon Jupp:** What have you done to review the impact of the changes you have made on audiences?

Tim Davie: We monitor the numbers—we talked about the 50%. I think we need a bit more time, if I'm honest. I think we just need to see them flow out for the next year and see where we end up.

Q72 **Simon Jupp:** What about skills for the future? Of course, you will have journalists come through who can write a story for online, but that is a very different set of skills from writing and putting together a radio package or a radio news bulletin. How are you going to make sure that you still have that talent pipeline?

Tim Davie: I think what we need to do is train people across media. Remember, we still have many people working in local radio across 39 sites, with apprenticeships as well. I think we need to continue that. Those craft skills are so important. The other thing is that they are under pressure in the wider market, as you know, so often we are the only show in town, in terms of proper training and production—



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Simon Jupp: That is the problem—

Tim Davie: No, we feel the responsibility. My vision would be that the multimedia training is really important. I would also say that if you are just a radio producer—I say “just” but they are brilliant and that is an amazing skill—and you are building your career, working and being able to work on the online environment as well, I think, is a real asset. I meet many people, and I think how we deliver that training and make sure that it is flawlessly delivered and supports people is the right question. We need to keep working on that.

- Q73 **Simon Jupp:** I have one or two other questions on a slightly different topic from local radio. When you announced all these changes to services because of the squeeze on the licence fee, you announced that Radio 4 Extra was going over linear DAB. Is that still the case?

Tim Davie: Maybe long term but not in the foreseeable—

- Q74 **Simon Jupp:** Not in the short term?

Tim Davie: Not in the short term, no.

- Q75 **Simon Jupp:** That is good news for me personally. When it comes to local television news, we have seen investment in some local regions—I think BBC South has had a refit recently. These programmes, even more so than BBC local radio, controversially in my view, have a very strong audience—

Tim Davie: A huge audience.

- Q76 **Simon Jupp:** And they continue to shine. My local is “BBC Spotlight”, which I think is the most watched regional news programme—rightly so—in the country. Are those protected from anything in the future that you can see at the moment? When you are horizon scanning—

Tim Davie: One of the things I don’t do—we get everyone wanting commitments on full protection on everything forever, and I’m not going to do that. One of the questions that I regularly ask people is, “What is the most successful television programme in the UK, day in, day out?” When “Traitors” does its business, we can beat it, or when “Strictly” has a good night, but day in, day out, it is the regional 6.30 news. It is absolutely critical.

One of the balances we’ve got to have is that, obviously, I want to ensure that we have the right teams and the right people in place, but also that we have invested in things like studios so that it looks fresh and we can present the stories. We are also trying to find more efficiencies in terms of how technology can help us. One of the things I am really excited by is the fact that technology sometimes allows us to eradicate the historical dividing line between network television and local television, in terms of the quality of the set or how it looks.

On your question, we think they are utterly precious, and the teams are doing a good job. I think I will leave it there. It is about more than just the



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half-hour programmes; it is the quality of the local and national programming, and I would include the nations—

Simon Jupp: Yes, of course. Nations and regions.

Tim Davie: We may get to nations at some point. I absolutely would include the nations in that.

Q77 **Simon Jupp:** You mentioned local radio staff having to diversify. I remember when I was in the BBC there was something called “Delivering Quality First”, which was a cuts programme—

Tim Davie: I remember it.

Simon Jupp: It was extremely painful, and nothing really changed. There was also the Spark process, which meant that television people did radio, radio people did television and all that kind of stuff, and that also didn't work. People are going to hate me for this, but are you also making sure that regional TV staff in particular are multimedia, so provide radio content too?

Tim Davie: I think there is a balance. Wherever you go—you will all have been to your local BBC offices—you meet people who are just outstanding. No one in the world can do what they do. They may be brilliant engineers focused on television delivery, and by the way they save the licence fee payer money day in, day out. In some ways, I don't need everyone to be multimedia. We will have some specialists, but not everyone. When you take journalists, people coming through the system and young producers, I absolutely think we need to help them with the skills to go across media. I think that will be essential.

The other thing is that a good story should not be stuck in one media outlet. If you have a great scoop or a really interesting story, I might go on at 6.30 pm but it is not online. How do you pick stuff up from a breakfast radio programme and make sure it is online within minutes? Those are the kind of things I am interested in editorially because they massively increase local engagement and reach.

Q78 **Simon Jupp:** I have one final question and then I will hand back to the Chair because I am conscious of time. The Local Democracy Reporting Service that you provide obviously top-slices from the licence fee. The salaries for those journalists are low, so is it proving difficult to recruit talented people up and down the country? Have you given any thought to allowing more money into that scheme so you can provide better—

Tim Davie: We have the 165 new jobs, and I am aware of the questions—

Simon Jupp: But the salary threshold is very, very low.

Tim Davie: It is lower. I haven't got any current plans in front of me. Can I take that away and reflect on it?

Simon Jupp: That would be great. Thank you very much.



Q79 Chair: I have a problem with this. It feels to me like you have taken a torch to a very delicate ecosystem of local news and current affairs. Bear with me as I set out my thinking on this. What you have done is taken away very valuable local radio coverage from some of our most vulnerable constituents—people who treasure it, and for whom it is a lifeline, a friend, and a huge asset to their lives—and according to the RAJAR figures your local radio listening is down 14% year on year.

At the same time, you very proudly talk about your expansion into local online news by rolling out your 34 websites and 130 more jobs to deliver more regional news, but you are delivering it in areas that are already covered by a lot of local commercial and independent publishers—in my area of Portsmouth, we have *The News*, which already has a website—that are already struggling because of the decline of print media across the board. At a stroke, you are effectively blowing up the local radio services that some people absolutely treasure and undermining the financial viability of some of our local independent publishers.

In the press yesterday, it was said that the BBC is proposing to carry advertising on some of its radio services, so it is effectively coming into competition with some of our local radio provision. Tim, talk to me about this. It seems to me that what you have done is to start picking away at a very delicate ecosystem. You are a public service broadcaster, but at one stroke you are seemingly trying to undermine every other aspect of the local news and current affairs that we value so dearly.

Tim Davie: Indeed. I think they are all very fair considerations. Any changes are very sensitive. This is very precious, and we do not underestimate that. I would push back on “blowing up”. We are keeping all of our 39 services. I think the numbers are a bit before the change, but we will see how this goes. It has been a big decision to keep all 39 stations and keep output local from 6 till 2, when by far the majority of the listening is. The afternoons still have good radio shows. We are doing 20 of them across the land. I am not underestimating the enormity of this, but the idea that we are blowing up the ecosystem or that my vision has been to collapse local radio is just not true. The vast majority of our money in our local offices goes to and will remain in linear services and broadcast television.

Then we get to the second point. We have to watch how we go. It is incredibly sensitive. If people read it and are understandably concerned that this is just the thin end of the wedge. I understand that. We have to see how we go. On local sports—I could go on and on about this—we do not underestimate the value of local sports coverage and all of those things. They are critical. We are not blowing that up. That is the first thing I would say. But I am not being naive. There is pain here and it is very difficult.

The second thing is, again, an area of concern. I don’t know whether we are going to talk about DAB or whatever, but I am absolutely someone—I think people know this—who thinks the BBC’s aim is not just to win share;



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it is to offer value for the licence fee. We should be a catalyst for market growth, not restricting the growth of others. I feel that very strongly.

With that in mind, there are two things. First, it would be wrong to say to the BBC, "You just sit on a declining linear radio market and your news." I love those services, but there is no forecast that says, "Linear is going to grow rapidly or enable you to reach enough people to justify a universal broadcasting service without getting into online." You have to be there. The question is: how are you there? Are you acting judiciously? Are you adding to the market?

Obviously we talk to the NMA, and there are legitimate concerns about the BBC. What I would say is that we come in a spirit of partnership—linkage and making sure we are linked to other people. We should be talking about partnership with the local press and how we do that. You have heard me say that before. Some of these things are structural. If you look at the decline of local print—I say this with a heavy heart—in other markets where the BBC is not present, look at the trend lines there and look at them where the BBC is. It is very similar, so I think this is not the BBC causing this issue. If you look at the amount of journalism we are producing, it is often very, very different or a different level of coverage compared with others in the market. But I would say that we need to be driven by the data, and we should be concerned about it.

Lastly, there is no proposal to put advertising on podcasts on BBC services. This is about when podcasts go on to third-party platforms where they normally have it—we have this already, whether on UKTV or BBC services on YouTube. That is being assessed at the moment. We are in the preliminary stages. Clearly, we do not want to be in a position where it negatively impacts the market in any way. That is where we are. But if you are putting your podcast on a third-party service, not on a BBC service—that is not where we want to go.

Q80 Chair: You are right that the local press has got a dwindling readership—we all know that—but I do not see how it is the role of a public service broadcaster to come out virtually in competition with their digital offer of local online news, or how that will make it better. What is your message to editors up and down the country who struggle with their readership and work very hard to deliver an online offer?

Tim Davie: We should be actively discussing that with the NMA, which we want to do, in terms of how we can grow the market together. This is often portrayed as a zero-sum game. My personal view is that we have a much bigger issue at play: the biggest threat is people disengaging from local news or going to hyper-local little networks. The local democracy reporters are essentially about market failure, regardless of the BBC. They were about a gap that was not being filled by anyone. If you look at the market in the round, we have a communal problem, which is: how many people are going to council meetings? How many people are holding local leaders to account? I do not see, with thinning economics on either side of the fence, how we cannot be talking a bit more about partnership.

So that is what we have to do, but it is difficult. Look, traditional business models are under so much strain, and I am very sympathetic. It is very difficult.

- Q81 **Chair:** When it comes to the story that was carried in *The Times* on Monday about advertising on podcasts and on-demand radio shows, is this advertising on purely commercial offers that are carried out by BBC Studios? Is that what we are talking about?

Tim Davie: It is not news and current affairs. On UKTV, BBC content has advertising around it, but not on the BBC service. It is a question of: if the market is all there, do you want to be there? We need to consider it, but that is where we are.

- Q82 **Chair:** This is content that has been put on other BBC services. How can identical offers be treated differently depending on the platforms they go out on? How does that work?

Tim Davie: I am sorry—help me to understand the question a little more. It would be clearly signposted that this is from the BBC. But around it, as this is a platform that has advertising, it would be as per their normal—

Chair: It is a bit like the UKTV operations—

Tim Davie: Yes. You are seeing a BBC comedy, and it has a BBC production credit, but it is clearly in a commercial environment.

- Q83 **Chair:** What is the Ofcom view on this? Have you had any conversations with them about it?

Tim Davie: I think we mentioned it in our latest update to Ofcom, and they can look at it, obviously. I think that is right, isn't it, Leigh?

Leigh Tavaziva: Yes. The proposals are at a very early stage, and we would absolutely expect that Ofcom would look at this under their operating framework if it is necessary and material to do so.

- Q84 **Chair:** So there is no substance to the worries of the commercial sector that the BBC could suddenly flood the market and drive down advertising prices.

Tim Davie: Again, they are legitimate concerns, but I think they are unfounded when we look at the data. I think this will be very marginal and, if anything, could hopefully grow the advertising market into quality speech audio. But, as you say, we are in the early stages. Ofcom needs to take a look at this, and we will go from there.

- Q85 **Steve Brine:** You said that we may talk about DAB, and we are going to talk about DAB. You have talked about compromise and about choices, so here is a choice. On 7 February you announced plans for “new, distinctive”—your words—DAB music stations as extensions for Radio 1, Radio 2 and Radio 3. You said they would be available on Sounds and that they would “look to delve deeper into specific genres and periods of music with context, curation and storytelling done in a way only the BBC can do.” The consultation on that closes in a week's time.



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Not unsurprisingly, that has caused some interest. Radiocentre said: "These...proposals are an attempt to directly imitate the recent success of commercial stations that already provide these...stations following years of significant investment made by our sector." Boom Radio was very critical and asked listeners to write to MPs, to complain to you and to respond to the consultation. It said that the new Radio 2 extension sounds remarkably like its own service.

How do you respond to criticism that you are creating new stations that encroach on what commercial radio is already doing? You are talking about compromise and choices, which Simon Jupp and the Chair have just liaised with you on, in terms of taking away services. Why are you creating something new while taking away something that works?

Tim Davie: I will work my way through that from the top, which is how we allocate our money. It is about where we can get most value for the licence fee so that we can give that value to households and get maximum return—this is critical—in terms of not just delivering reach but doing things that only the BBC can do. That is what guides our decision making—no more, no less.

When it comes to the radio market—I have been around this block a while—what has been happening on DAB is incredibly exciting. The fact that we have massively expanded the choice of radio stations on linear has been a fabulous success. The reason I am going there is that consumer behaviour has changed so radically. So this is about radical changes in the market. We have vast amounts of stations now. We have vast amounts of streams. On the side of that, we have Spotify. I am very proud that the BBC invested millions of pounds as an intervention to grow DAB.

In that context, commercial radio has gained good share, and we have done a good job of maintaining our reach, to a degree. But there comes a point where you go, "How do I ensure that BBC radio"—it's not about growing share—"maintains its relevance to the number of people who come to it each week, so that we can justify a universal intervention?"

What I am saying is that when I looked at the analysis, which is very clear, there were two things. First, if you look at what is the right portfolio of radio streams and stations, whereas we have seen rapid expansion around us, it absolutely makes sense to have a slightly more extended portfolio. Secondly, the costs are pretty small. Finally, and critically, could I guarantee that there were utterly unique in terms of their playlists and what we do? Again, the final thing is that Ofcom will look at the competitive market. Ofcom can look at this—we have shown our proposals—and get really tucked in on it.

Q86 Steve Brine: So what is it going to cost? It is going to cost something, right? We just had a long discussion about the services you are cutting elsewhere. What is it going to cost?

Tim Davie: Well, we have to wait until it's approved to see what we do.

Steve Brine: But you wouldn't have gone out to consultation if you did

not know.

Tim Davie: You are talking very low—£2 million or £3 million—in terms of investment.

Q87 **Steve Brine:** That is a lot of money.

Let us look at it briefly through the lens of Ken Bruce. We had a discussion involving a football analogy earlier, and I enjoyed your taking it on, so let us continue with that analogy. You want your best players on the pitch, or at the club, don't you? When Spurs sold Harry Kane, at least we got £100 million for him; with Ken Bruce, you let him go on a free and take all his listeners with him. Since his move a year ago, more than a million listeners have followed him to Greatest Hits Radio, with "PopMaster", which you had an option on years ago that you did not take. Greatest Hits has seen its overall audience increase by 70%. Ken Bruce had 8.2 million listeners on the biggest radio show in the country; Vernon Kay now has just under 7 million listeners.

Ken Bruce obviously wanted to speak, and he did in a big interview in one of the Saturday newspapers earlier this month. He said that you've subsequently said you were going to offer him a new contract, but that three months before the end of his contract, nothing was coming. He also mentioned how odd it is that although he suggested years ago that you could cater to the younger end of the Radio 2 audience by doing something different while protecting the golden goose that was what he and Steve Wright were doing, you got rid of them both. One of your best players has gone to one of your opponents, who is killing you, yet now you are reinventing with these new DAB streams.

Tim Davie: No. There has always been reinvention, by the way. I think Ken Bruce is an outstanding talent—

Steve Brine: Why let him go then?

Tim Davie: I am not going to go into the individual decisions or discussions with an individual. I'm just not. All I would say is that he is an outstanding broadcaster and Greatest Hits are lucky to have him. I think that on Radio 2 we have a first-class broadcaster in Vernon, and 7 million is very good.

Steve Brine: Yes, but it is 1.3 million less than the guy you let go.

Tim Davie: To be fair, my measures are all about what our overall reach is for BBC radio and whether we are distinctive. Also, are we delivering the right value? You are not going to keep everyone. Everyone is going to have different decisions and at the end of contracts they are going to make different decisions and you are going to have different discussions. Without getting into all the detail of it, I have the highest regard for Ken. He is a wonderful broadcaster and I really mean that. Greatest Hits has done a great job.

Q88 **Steve Brine:** But presumably as the manager or chief executive of the



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club, you regret that he is no longer in the stable.

Tim Davie: As a Palace fan, I could list a lot of players I would rather have kept on the pitch.

Q89 **Steve Brine:** As a Spurs fan, let's not get into Palace.

Finally, you mentioned with Clive Efford earlier the social media guidelines about Gary Lineker, and you said, "Am I going to pick up a newspaper at some point in the next six months and not see a furore about something?" I'll give you one for free—

Tim Davie: Thank you for that.

Steve Brine: There is of course a way that you can ensure that over the next six months, including during the general election campaign, you don't pick up a newspaper and see things that Gary Lineker has said: if he just tweets about something for which you pay him £1.35 million of our constituents' money—otherwise known as the licence fee—which is football. If he just sticks to football, it's game over.

Tim Davie: I understand. We have considered an appropriate set—I don't know whether you have read the John Hardie review—

Steve Brine: Of course.

Tim Davie: It is a well considered piece of work. We can go round the roundabout on that one, but we have made it clear that we think that, for our flagship presenters, we are in a reasonable position.

Q90 **Steve Brine:** But if he just tweets about football, there wouldn't be a problem, would there?

Tim Davie: I think we have been clear about our social media guidelines, which are absolutely to protect the BBC's position.

Q91 **Steve Brine:** I know you have gone head to head with him before, and it didn't end well. I am just saying, if he tweets about what you pay him a lot of money for, you won't have a problem. I am guessing that morale at HQ is not great when there is a Gary Lineker story on the front page of the papers. If that happens during a general election campaign, there will be lots of people with a lot less generous views of the BBC than us who will use that to attack you, won't there?

Tim Davie: I agree with you. It is very important that people stick with the social media guidelines and that they are applied, particularly going into an election. I agree.

Steve Brine: Let's hope they do.

Q92 **Julie Elliott:** On equal pay, it is now more than six years since our predecessor Committee started to look at this in the BBC. Last June, you told us there were eight equal pay cases open internally in the BBC. What is the number now?



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Leigh Tavaziva: That is correct. Last year, we said there were eight equal pay cases. We currently have 17 pay cases open, which is one in 1,000 employees; we have 17,000 employees at the BBC. Over the last few years, we have continued to have small numbers relative to the overall population of our employee base. Eleven of those 17 pay cases are equal pay cases. The eight pay cases that you referred to from the last time we were here have all been closed.

Q93 **Julie Elliott:** Were they settled in court or out of court by negotiation? Did they cost money?

Leigh Tavaziva: We have a range of outcomes. Sometimes they are not concluded, and the complainant will effectively remove them. Sometimes they need to be settled—

Q94 **Julie Elliott:** How many of those eight were removed?

Leigh Tavaziva: I do not know the number. I was just giving you a range of options or outcomes that could happen. We may absolutely settle a number of them, and then some may end up in an employment tribunal. That is correct as well.

Q95 **Julie Elliott:** Let's move on to the demise of the News Channel last year, which has been mentioned briefly. I want to ask you this, Tim. At the time, I was fairly straightforward in what my view on that decision was: it was a disaster. I would suggest that I have been proven to be right, as it has been a disaster in terms of news coverage in the UK. The Nicky Campbell thing, which you said was going to be the best thing that could happen, basically—I'm paraphrasing, but we had a backwards and forwards on that and I said, "Well, it is not news," and you said it was. It was cut in October to half the time because it did not work. If we link this to equal pay and the position of women news presenters in your organisation, there are, I think, five who have been on garden leave for best part of a year. I am not sure exactly what those presenters are paid, although we know what pay ranges they are in. We are talking about £1.5 million of taxpayers' money for really high-quality news presenters. What's happening with those women? Where are they going to end up?

Tim Davie: Again, I remember our discussion last time we were here. We are working through to reach a fair resolution, and I think that is what we are trying to do in terms of people applying for roles and getting appointed. I am cautious, because obviously we can't go into individual cases. However, clearly we do not want to be in a position where we are paying people who are not working. That is far from ideal. I think we are getting to a point where are resolving the situation.

Q96 **Julie Elliott:** But they are not working through no fault of their own—it is because of an organisational change that you decided on and you looked at. This did not happen overnight. This would have been looked at for months—at least—before this happened, and yet we are a year on and these things still aren't resolved, which is not really a very good place to be. What is morale like among women news presenters in your organisation?



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Tim Davie: Again, when I get asked about morale, it is difficult because it depends on the individual and where they are in processes. You can talk to different people within the newsroom who have different views.

Q97 **Julie Elliott:** In general, the women news presenters on any of your national programmes.

Tim Davie: Are you talking about that specific group?

Julie Elliott: Not just the women affected by this, but the women who present news programmes across your national output.

Tim Davie: Across all national output? Well, I think it would be mixed. You would have different views from different people. This relates to the comments that we had last time. It is not a good situation where you are paying people—and we are trying to get it resolved as fast as possible. I recognise that it has been going on for some time, absolutely.

Q98 **Julie Elliott:** From the people I speak to, and I speak to many of your women broadcasters, and have done for years, since this all started—I think I am one of the few people on the Committee, and John, who were involved when it all started—I would suggest that every month morale is worse than the month before. I wouldn't have thought that was possible, so I think your view of morale being mixed is not the view I get.

Going back to the channel that replaced the News Channel, if we look at what it is doing now, compared with what it was doing when it started almost a year ago, it is doing more news, I think. Because it wasn't working; it was never going to work with the format you suggested. We have already been asked questions about this coming year. There are not just elections in this country. We have got European elections and American elections. I have never known a year like it for elections.

Inevitably, the news coverage will increase during that period, I would have thought. I think we are looking at a programme that is shifting more to what we had before 1 April last year, and you still have all these women not placed. Do you think that is going to cause you potential problems?

Tim Davie: I think we need to resolve the last issue as quickly as possible. I take your comments that it has taken a long time to resolve. We and the team are trying to act as fairly as we can and work through that. I take your feedback. On the new channel itself, I remain convinced that, on the budget problems we have, to have two completely separate organisations was the wrong thing. That is where I continue to hold ground on that.

I take your points but, to be fair, we did say we would take stock and see how it was going, make some adjustments, things that work, things that don't work. We have said publicly that we have got a single feed, but we can also go to different streams. This will put some pressure on us this year, to ensure you are keeping relevant. It is clearly important to have our international news.



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The last quarter of '23, we still reached 6 million people, so it is an important thing. That was up 20% on the previous quarter. We remain in our leading position in news, and also globally we have never been more important. There is a whole separate question I've got on the World Service funding. If I had concerns, that would be top of the list.

The answer to your question is that we are going to have ensure that that organisation uses those separate live stream operations when it needs it, and basically gets it right through those. I haven't got a lot to add in terms of your challenge, apart from that I think we can meet it.

Q99 Julie Elliott: It is looking much less likely that there is going to be a general election in this country in May. There are still a few days, I think, when it could be announced.

Tim Davie: That is one thing I won't speculate on.

Q100 Julie Elliott: The mood music is that we think we are looking at a later point, but we know there will be a general election in this country by the end of January next year. Yet, you still don't seem to know how this channel is going to work in a general election, when we could potentially have been in a general election campaign by next week.

Tim Davie: We will make sure we have got the right level of UK ops. I come back to my point of what we also have. In terms of election coverage, I don't think you are going to have a problem. We will be heavy on BBC One. We have an outstanding team. Online coverage will be huge, and then the channel will do its business. We have got to get that right. That is just part of managing the day-to-day operation of the BBC.

Q101 Julie Elliott: It sounds very loose to me. But, if we go back to the position of women news broadcasters in your organisation, and the position of equal pay claims, it may be small numbers that are in train, but they have gone up quite considerably from the numbers you gave us last year: eight to 17 is quite a big jump.

Tim Davie: Are we talking about equal pay?

Q102 Julie Elliott: Yes.

Leigh Tavaziva: We have gone up from eight to 11 on equal pay, because we have 17 pay cases overall.

Q103 Julie Elliott: You have still gone up. This is when we have been told repeatedly in this Committee that all the processes are in place. There have been major moves forward in a lot of areas, but I still don't think you have got the higher areas right, where these pay bands don't really apply. However, your equal pay cases are going up. Equal pay cases in workplaces are quite uncommon when you have had such an intense focus on equal pay in an organisation, and such a massive change in pay structures to try to avoid such things. Yet the number of cases is still coming in and it is still going up. Why is that happening, Tim?

Tim Davie: To be fair, 11 out of 18,000—I just want to put that in perspective, because that is important. Every case is an issue—I've got it.



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Julie Elliott: But you should not be having any equal pay cases.

Tim Davie: I understand that. What the norm is, or the rounding error of one or two—I've got no idea how low you can get. Can you get to zero? Of course, we should be trying to get to zero. I think we have made enormous progress, to be fair.

Julie Elliott: I have said that, yes.

Tim Davie: We have the pay bands now. We have structure. We have a really clear structure.

Q104 **Julie Elliott:** How many equal pay cases have you got among the employees that those pay bands refer to?

Leigh Tavaziva: Every employee across the BBC other than the executive is assigned to a pay band.

Q105 **Julie Elliott:** Including all presenters?

Leigh Tavaziva: Yes. Only the executive do not have a pay band. So all employees have a pay band. The career path framework is visible to all employees. You can see where you are in the pay band relative to others in the pay band. The transparency we have put in place is better than anyone.

Q106 **Julie Elliott:** So are all the outstanding equal pay claims in those pay bands, or are some of them at executive level?

Leigh Tavaziva: I am not personally aware of any equal payment—

Tim Davie: When you say "executive", you are talking about a tiny group. I am not aware of any equal pay claims there. I think it is all people in pay bands.

Q107 **Julie Elliott:** The pay bands have now been there for four or five years. After four or five years of those bands being in place and the amount of energy and scrutiny your employees have gone under to make sure they are in the right place and in the right bands, how are you still getting equal pay claims?

Leigh Tavaziva: In a large organisation with thousands and thousands of people, pay cases are being raised for one in 1,000. They could be for a variety of things, not necessarily equal pay. Any organisation is always going to have a small number. It is really important that we manage the structures we have put in place—we have to watch.

Then, we have a number of additional things. Along with the structures, we have an exceptions committee. We have senior leaders who review any pay award made out of alignment and improve them. So we have monitoring at that level. It is also monitored at our RemCo—our remuneration committee—at board. That is important, too—that we have board oversight. We also do independent equal pay audits. You will remember that we had the Equality and Human Rights Commission work. That gave us a set of—



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Q108 Julie Elliott: This is exactly my point, though. You have all those processes now. The organisation under yourselves and previous people who have been to this Committee has had this under a magnifying glass for more than six years. What I am struggling with is that, although it is small numbers, if we were looking at an organisation that had not done all of that, then 11 in however many thousand is not huge. But when you have had all of that, and you have all these processes, how is this still happening?

Tim Davie: These are cases—they may or may not be valid at this point. If you have 18,000 people—I come back to this because it is material. You have a very small group of people who can legitimately ask: “Is my position in the pay band due to gender in any way?” We are in a position where I believe we are now delivering rationally equal pay flawlessly across the organisation.

Q109 Julie Elliott: How many of the eight cases that are now settled one way or the other were found to have a valid equal pay claim?

Leigh Tavaziva: I would have to provide that information to you separately. I do not have it.

Q110 Julie Elliott: Will you write to us on that?

Leigh Tavaziva: Yes, of course. I would be happy to do that.

Q111 Chair: Leigh, what is the gender pay gap at the BBC?

Leigh Tavaziva: Let me just remind myself. In our last reported numbers, which were for the financial year '22-23, our median gender pay gap was 7.3%.

Q112 Chair: How does that compare to the last two or three years? Is it getting better or worse?

Leigh Tavaziva: We have seen improvements in the gender pay gap. As far as I am aware, the lowest that we reported recently was 5%. That was an increase. There are some really specific reasons why the gender pay gap will move—in line with any of our other pay gaps—

Q113 Chair: Sorry, that was not clear. Is the gender pay gap today better or worse than it was two years ago?

Leigh Tavaziva: My expectation is that we will see that pay gap at around 7%, but it may increase, yes.

Q114 Chair: But is the 7.3% gender pay gap you just mentioned higher or lower than—

Leigh Tavaziva: It is higher than was reported in 2021-2022. That was the comment I made: in 2021-2022, we reported a gender pay gap of 5.9% and in 2022-2023, we reported a pay gap of 7.3%. But there are really specific reasons why a pay gap will move and I think it is really important that we understand that. Tim has talked a lot today about our apprenticeship programme. We find our apprenticeship cohort will reflect a different diversity mix than our general population, and we actually report



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on all our pay gaps, not just gender: we report on other pay gaps as well. Of course, remember, most apprentices will come in at entry levels in a role, so when you are talking about a median pay gap and you are bringing more diversity at more entry levels, that median pay gap will increase.

We have also done a number of other specific interventions. We have been looking at pay progression; that is really important. We have been talking about the career path framework and how employees move through that career path framework and through that pay range as well. We have made a number of specific interventions to directly address where we were not seeing employees progress through that. That has specifically targeted longstanding employees who may have been at the lower end of a pay range and we felt that it was important that we could demonstrate they were moving through the pay range. That has, itself, had an impact on the median pay range.

One other example that will impact on gender is, of course, in a high inflation environment, we have seen high demand and high salary requirements on specific types of skills, particularly in technology and software engineering, as we drive digital. That has meant that we have had to increase salaries specifically for those populations to meet industry demand and ensure we can retain that talent. It is fundamental to our digital strategy. Of course, generally—while we work incredibly hard to increase the number of women who are in technology and STEM roles—that population is biased more towards men. When you are making targeted pay interventions like that, which impact on an area where the industry balance is not equal across men and women, you will also see an impact.

It has gone up, as you have rightly asked me. I think we are very clear about why it is going up and that is really important, so we understand that. I think the real question for us continues to be: how do we support apprentices and new people coming into the organisation to flow upwards through the organisation and, of course, move into more leadership positions? That also impacts pay gaps. A more senior mix in leadership positions will also support that.

I think we manage it well; it goes all the way through our governance. It is regularly reviewed at our remuneration committee, with oversight by the board. Yes, it has gone up but, I think, for reasons that are really explicable and we are comfortable.

Tim Davie: If I may—

Chair: I am grateful for the explanation about how the gender pay gap works, when I was the Minister who put through the legislation. Thank you. Carry on.

Tim Davie: It is a really big debate for us because we are still well ahead of most other players in the market. My discussion with Leigh and others is: actually, we do not want to do things that are not logical and that



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counter common sense just to maintain it at 5% when, actually, getting more women into the apprenticeship scheme may, in the short term, move your gap a little bit in the context of being well ahead.

The other thing we are quite obsessed by—and we are all over this—is the pay gap by band, which is much lower than the average. The maths is kind of weird but that is how it works. We are looking at that all the time because the headline number is obviously important but the number within band is important and gives us some reassurance. It also gets to the earlier, and very valid, questions around equal pay. There are other metrics that we can look at in that context.

John Nicolson: I think we just witnessed BBC-splaining, if we can coin a new phrase.

Chair: Yes. I am really grateful for that.

Q115 **John Nicolson:** I am glad you have been brought up to date on what the pay gap means. Director-General, can you update me on the total cost of the lawyers for fighting women on equality? In your last couple of appearances, you have updated us on the eye-watering figures; what is the latest?

Leigh Tavaziva: I will need to bring that information back and I am more than happy—

Q116 **John Nicolson:** I am sorry you did not bring that. I do raise it every time, so it is not an unexpected question. The last couple of times you have told us it was well over £1 million and, just to confirm, you have not won a single case against a single woman; every case has been either settled or lost, is that correct?

Leigh Tavaziva: We have only ever lost one case, but we have settled—

Q117 **John Nicolson:** You have settled or lost, exactly as I said.

On the question of the gender pay gap, however, you explained to the Chair that it has increased. You said that that was because lots of younger and more junior people were moving in. However, it is worth pointing out that the pay gap has also increased among BAME people and LGBTQ+ people. It has increased in each of those groups; I see from your nods that you are confirming that.

Director-General, you said something earlier that really pleased me. You said that we should be kind, and I thought that was striking. You don't hear that often enough in politics. Kindness is immensely important. In the debate that we are having—it frustrates me that it is called a debate, because it is actually about human rights—I get contacted a lot by trans people who tell me how distressing it is to have their very identity attacked all the time. In fact, somebody came up to me recently in the street and said, "Thanks for standing up for us, because we just feel so embattled." That was a young girl. It is worth remembering that there are people here; they are not just political pawns. Thank you for acknowledging that.



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Tim Davie: Thank you.

Q118 **John Nicolson:** Black people are leaving the BBC at higher rates than they join. Isn't that correct, Mr Davie?

Tim Davie: Leigh, have you got the—

Leigh Tavaziva: No, I don't have them.

Tim Davie: I haven't got the numbers in front of me in terms of BAME departures versus hires. For fear of BBC-splaining, can I give a little context on that in terms of where I think we are at?

John Nicolson: Yes.

Tim Davie: When I set the diversity targets of 50/20/12—it is now 50/20/12/25; the 25 is socioeconomic diversity—we talked about improving the BBC. Part of that is across the UK as well, but we wanted a more diverse population. This is dangerous territory, but I did not see that as particularly "progressive"; I saw it as just the right way for an organisation that represents all of the population to do its business. If you look at my overall tenure, we are now at over 17% BAME population, which is a really great achievement. Show me an organisation that has made that progress.

Secondly, in senior management—this was a thing that was really animating me, if you want to know—there were not enough senior black, Asian or minority ethnic leaders. My personal view is that you can have however many people in the organisation, but if you can't see them at a senior level—but I can now list a number of very senior black and ethnic minority leaders in the organisation in positions of serious power. That has changed.

John Nicolson: We are going to return to this.

Tim Davie: What is happening is that there is a challenge with retaining very high-potential and good, BBC-trained BAME colleagues.

Q119 **John Nicolson:** But it is not just people at that level who are leaving. I put out a call for people—

Tim Davie: I am talking about all levels. My comment on that was not about the senior levels; it was all levels.

Q120 **John Nicolson:** Okay. I put out a call for people to contact me, and it was a useful exercise.

Tim Davie: As ever.

John Nicolson: I can tell you that most members of the public who approached me asked me to ask you questions about local radio, which has been covered, and about bias, which has also been covered. But BBC staff also sent me direct messages. I got a completely disproportionate number of messages from BAME members of staff, and a disproportionate number from women. The issues that they wanted me to raise with you

are diversity, equality and bullying.

I am going to quote some things that people have said to me. They all asked me not to say who they are. Here is one quote: "Diversity at news editor level is non-existent. Some areas have not employed a black person for decades. Please ask the Director-General if he has been contacted by black staff who have expressed their unhappiness and feelings of discrimination." To which the answer is?

Tim Davie: I have no doubt that over three years I will have received emails from BAME staff raising issues—

John Nicolson: And had meetings?

Tim Davie: And I have met—

John Nicolson: I think you have—

Tim Davie: Mr Nicolson, you are talking to someone who is the executive sponsor of the BAME network. Embrace have absolutely spent enormous time on this. Do we still have areas of challenge? Of course we do. If you ask 20,000 people, as I know you do—I respect the process—you will get different versions of people's experiences within the BBC, inevitably.

John Nicolson: Okay, here's someone else—

Tim Davie: I am not dismissing them; I am just saying how you deal with them.

Q121 **John Nicolson:** Here's somebody else: "We're woefully behind our diversity targets. No black or Asian manager exists in many areas, and they tend to be mostly in black-led areas, like the music station Radio 1Xtra. Diversity pay gaps have grown," as we have established. This person said to me: "I'm leaving. I'm tired of struggling and fighting."

Here's someone else: "If the Director-General says he doesn't have a problem with sexism and bullying, please reinforce to him that we were very optimistic. As women and as black women, we were optimistic when he started. We feel that he does believe in equality. He's just not delivering it."

There are some more. I would just like you to respond.

Tim Davie: It's always upsetting when you hear someone in our organisation who feels that—that is how I respond to it. There is no doubt that if you ask an organisation of 20,000 people, of the nature of the BBC, you are going to get different views. I have to step back and say a couple of things. Do we have the right set of values and culture, setting it from the top with my management? I think we do. The second thing—bear with me. You have asked me the question, and I will respond. The second thing is: do we have the processes by which people can speak up? Actually, if you want to know, one of my responses is that we need to get, as an organisation, to a point where, rather than raising it in a direct message to you—I say this with the greatest respect—they have confidence in the



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organisation, because that is success for me. That is the other reaction I've got. And one individual is one too many.

The next point—sorry, and then I will be done with my BBC-splaining. The point I would push back on a little bit is the number of black and Asian, British Asian, ethnic minority leaders we have. The chief financial officer of BBC Studios; the finance director of BBC News; the head of music across Radio 2 and Radio 1, running the whole show, not just niche services—a fantastic executive—the head of Radio 4 and all speech radio. I could go on. There are loads of people now. There are certain areas where I would like to see it better.

The other thing is that if I employ you, Mr Nicolson, as a senior leader in the BBC, you are now assessed every year against your delivery against those targets. We are not woefully behind, by the way. We are broadly on track. We are now an organisation that is majority women. Women are over 50%. We are now at 17% and broadly on track on BAME. The number I am most worried about is people with disability. That is the one that is hard to move. On socioeconomic diversity we are at 21.1% in the last report, and I need to get to 25%. Those are the facts.

Q122 **John Nicolson:** I will read you one of those ones in just a second, but you said that you wished that people had the confidence to come to you and talk about it.

Tim Davie: Many do.

John Nicolson: I'm sure they do, but I am pleased that people have the confidence to write to us—

Tim Davie: Of course.

John Nicolson: —and to know that their confidentiality will be respected. One said to me: "In many ways, the situation has worsened. If we raise certain issues like bullying, the bullying gets worse, and in fact, those of us who speak out about discrimination"—this is another BAME person—"we find that our careers get affected if we speak out."

Tim Davie: Clearly, that would be totally unacceptable, so that individual we need to support, and hopefully they will feel the confidence to come into the system and get support. I can't really add much on these individual cases because, as I say, I have to look at the overall staff survey on how we are doing and talk to the groups—engage with Embrace and the other staff networks. They are the kinds of things you do to change this.

John Nicolson: I promised I would quote things to you, and that is what I am doing.

Tim Davie: Of course.

Q123 **John Nicolson:** On the issue of class: "As someone whose contract with the BBC ends in a couple of weeks, I've no idea for the first time in my



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10-year career where my next pay cheque will come from. I'm working class. The media wasn't easy for me to get into. I don't have any safety net. It's scary to think that the media industry, especially the BBC, can be run by the elite, who can take several months without work until the drought dies down. I'm not in that position."

Tim Davie: There is a big industry problem here. If you haven't read the Bectu report on freelancers, by the way, I really recommend it. It is a sobering read. Sixty-eight per cent of freelancers aren't in work at the moment. This is really worrying. To your point, I think that really puts pressure on particular people. It is obvious, but there are young people who are able to live at home or have more resource. I think things are stacked against people in a way that is problematic, just being very direct with you. I care about that, and it is difficult.

The BBC is trying to be a supportive employer. Frankly, I think the BBC is at the good end of the market in terms of being supportive of people. We have the RAISED network, where we talk about it. I certainly don't consider myself and the senior executives to have come from backgrounds where we had silver spoons emerging from our mouths. I really don't think that is the case.

Also, if I may, we are one of only a handful of organisations that have set a socioeconomic diversity target, if you are interested in this area, and that has been punchy. We have set the target. If I was prioritising the issues, though, I would go out in the wider industry; it is about how we support all those workers. It has always been the case that in certain pockets of the industry—not so much in journalism and your background, but in the production of dramas and others—it can be quite a transient, slightly exposed lifestyle in terms of where you get your next work from. I think there is some cause for reflection for the industry to think about how we navigate the next—

Q124 **John Nicolson:** There are two programmes that I care about a lot in particular. One is "Newsnight", which I worked on—the mood is bleak at "Newsnight"—and the other is "The Nine". I argued very strongly for a separate Scottish "Six", and "The Nine" was the consolation prize. Everybody knew at the time that, if you put it on that channel at that time of night, its viewing figures are not going to do well. When you wanted to defend the programme, you argued on a corporate basis that it was doing incredibly well and doing much better than Sky. When you wanted to get rid of the programme, you said, "It's not doing at all well and therefore we've got to get rid of it," all of which was very BBC. Incidentally, at this point, I would like to say that one of the stars of the show, Nick Sheridan—a young broadcaster in his early 30s—died tragically. I would like to offer my condolences to him, his partner and his family.

Tim Davie: Thank you very much for that. He was an outstanding colleague and I know he will be sorely missed. I know you have been—

John Nicolson: I wish I had known him. I have seen his videos playing



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music and he just seems like the nicest and kindest guy.

Tim Davie: He will be sadly missed. I appreciate your words very much.

Q125 **John Nicolson:** Two very quick questions before I finish, because we are out of time. The staff at “Newsnight” think that you are getting ready to cut them by another 10 minutes, down to 30 minutes. They are already feeling very depressed about the programme. They miss the film-making, and the programme is not what it was. Is that true? Are you going to do that after the May elections?

Tim Davie: It is not a plan that I have in front of me, no. That is for News and BBC One and others to propose if and when, but that is not a plan I have seen.

Q126 **John Nicolson:** On the issue of being kind, are you going to bring Huw Edwards back?

Tim Davie: I am not going to comment on individual cases—you know that. All I would say is that we have just got to get through the process fairly and with the right values.

Q127 **John Nicolson:** He hasn’t done anything wrong that I can see.

Tim Davie: I am not going to talk on a specific case.

Q128 **John Nicolson:** It is in his contract that he gets to present the elections. I know that you are in a bit of a state worrying about what you are going to do at the next elections. Do you bring him back? Probably not. But what do you about his contract? You don’t have anybody else lined up. You are thinking about all sorts of different people.

Tim Davie: I don’t recognise for a minute being in a bit of a state. I might be in a bit of a state on a few things, but that ain’t one of them. I will tell you one thing—

John Nicolson: Huw Edwards was a major talent.

Tim Davie: I think everyone realises that working through the process fairly and judiciously, and not commenting on individuals in this way, is the right thing to do. That has got to be the right thing. We are talking about being kind; I think that would be the kind thing to do.

John Nicolson: Well, I just want to express support for Huw Edwards, because I can’t see what he has done wrong. I know this is in his contract and I know he is going through a difficult time in the public eye, and I think he deserves support from colleagues and ex-colleagues, which I am giving him here. Chair, thank you very much indeed.

Chair: Thank you, John. Last but not least, Alex.

Q129 **Alex Sobel:** Thank you. I will be quick because we are already into PMQs. We are in the midst of an inquiry into film and high-end television so it would be remiss of me not to ask you a couple of questions to aid our inquiry. We have seen that the independent film sector in the UK is



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growing but struggling. We have just had the really welcome intervention by the Treasury of the new tax credits for smaller films with a budget under £15 million. How does the BBC support independent British film through your commissioning or through the acquisition of independent British films?

Tim Davie: You have had evidence, I think, from Eva Yates, the outstanding leader of our work in film. As you know, it is very tough. If you are an independent film-maker, raising the finance is brutal at the moment. I just want to echo what you said: getting the tax credit is incredibly important, and it is proven in this industry to really turbocharge or safeguard a sector. First, that is good news. Secondly, local storytelling is so important, and us protecting together independent British film is critical to our culture.

On the BBC, you have been given evidence, so I will try not to take long, because I know that there is other stuff going on outside this room that may be more interesting. I think you have heard a lot of evidence. We have a small budget. I cannot deficit-fund films and we cannot make that business work. We are not going to say suddenly, "With £200 million of the licence fee"—I've got enough problems trying to work it out—"we're going to make films." But what we can do with the £11 million that we spend is to be absolutely catalytic in terms of making projects happen and being the first domino, if you like. I think we do that brilliantly. That is our role.

On the buying side, it is a market. There are people concerned about rates, but at the end of the day it is a competitive market once you have a finished film. The problem is really about getting the financing at the front end, and that is a really deep problem. The BBC can absolutely play its part. If you go to investors with the BBC attached to a film, it can absolutely help. That is our role, as opposed to deficit-financing, which we just cannot do. It would soak up all the budget; the budget of local radio and a few other things we care about would be gone in one movie.

Q130 **Alex Sobel:** I have visited the BBC World Service twice recently and I think they do such an important job globally.

Tim Davie: An amazing job, yes.

Alex Sobel: We are at a time of a rise in autocracies, and democracy is at a really strained point. The media have a really important role to play in that. For instance, we have not had an Albanian Service since 2011 and the Russian Service is now internet-only and I understand there are some technical difficulties there. It is so important that communities like those and many others in other parts of their world can turn on their radio and hear the BBC. The media sources they are getting in their own countries are not just biased but full of misinformation and disinformation. What could we do, or what could be done, to try to reinflate the World Service?

Tim Davie: I think there are two things. First, the World Service is utterly critical. It is one of the great national treasures and it is not just historical; it is more needed now than ever. We need to look at and invest in our soft



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power, bluntly. The problem is that we have not increased it. We have kept our £254 million or whatever the number is, and we are very grateful for the £103 million-odd that is coming from Government, but at the end of the day, if I started cutting domestic services—we are heading for a big decision on the World Service and how we fund it. I just put that marker down. In the short term, we have an agreement with the Foreign Office, we get the investment and we have been able to protect the language services. But there is a bigger question about the World Service that is coming fast and I think we will need your support, so thank you for your kind words.

Chair: Good. Thank you very much, Alex. You are off the hook. Thank you very much, all of you, for your time and your wide variety of evidence today. We are really grateful for your taking the opportunity to give us all your thoughts on a range of different subjects.