

## **Professor Robert Beveridge—written evidence (FCF0001)**

### **House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee inquiry into the future of Channel 4**

I write this in the expectation and assumption that HMG's consultation is little more than going through the motions but am very pleased that this HOL committee is undertaking this inquiry

Furthermore, I would hope (wouldn't we all?), that HMG and DCMS in particular, had paid more attention to the conclusions reached by "your Committee's predecessor in 2016 that the risks of privatisation, both for Channel 4 and for the creative industries, outweighed any potential benefits".

However, my assumption is that the decision has already been taken and that channel 4 will be privatised, to the detriment of Channel 4, PSB as a whole and the country.

That HMG has now advertised posts as non executive directors for Channel 4 with the requirement that "*all candidates... indicate if they have experience of having led or been part of a board stewarding a business through a significant corporate transaction*" merely serves to reinforce

This will most probably happen despite the strength, quality and a large majority of responses being opposed to this. However, my hope is that the House of Lords Committee will be able to make an evidence based powerful case against these proposals

That Channel 4 has been and continues to be a success for some forty years, despite the social, cultural, economic and technological changes over that period is a testament to the model which underpins it.

### **Channel 4 is not required to divert funds from content to line the pockets of shareholders.**

### **Quality, diversity, serving the needs of the viewers and pluralism of voice are its raison d'être.**

This is the foundation of Public Service Broadcasting which has been such a British success story.

**To those such as John Whittingdale who assert that regulation will ensure the continuation of eg Channel 4 news in its present form, we only need to look at the failure of Ofcom to maintain a range of genres on ITV and production in and across the regions.**

**How long would it be before the privatised Channel 4, arguing economic reality, sought to loosen the licence?**

I heard Lord Burns, at a Voice of the Listener and Viewer conference, make the point that the sell off the London C4 headquarters and indeed the sale of channel 4 would, in the context of overall government spending, be little more than loose change.

Please read and take into account a number of the already published comments made in relation to this unsupportable proposal but in the event that you have not, I am providing some which need to be considered.

- i. Channel 4's unique programming wouldn't survive a sell-off | Dorothy Byrne

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jun/25/channel-4-unique-programming-profits-owner>

- ii. I owe Margaret Thatcher a debt of thanks for creating Channel 4. Now her heirs could destroy it | David Olusoga

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jul/25/i-owe-margaret-thatcher-a-debt-of-thanks-for-creating-channel-4>

- iii. <https://www.screendaily.com/features/incredibly-short-sighted-uk-industry-reacts-to-possible-privatisation-of-film4/5161772.article>

In response to your specific questions:

1) *What, if any, developments over the last five years give cause to re-evaluate the ownership of Channel 4 Corporation?*

Channel 4 has made a success of its streaming platform all 4. This will continue therefore the answer to this question is there no need to re-evaluate.

2) *If Channel 4 Corporation were privatised, what would be the benefits? What would be the risks and to what extent could they be mitigated?*

The benefits would be to the shareholders and the disadvantages to the citizen and the psb ecology as a whole. Despite regulation, the budgets of eg channel 4 news would decrease in the interest of profit per se.

3) *If Channel 4 were to remain in public ownership, what would be the benefits? Insofar as they are valid, how could concerns about its longer-term viability be addressed?*

Channel 4 news and the need for diversity and range of programming eg all 4 drama broadcasts would continue to the benefit of society as a whole.

4) *Should the regulation and/or remit of Channel 4 be changed, irrespective of its ownership? What would be the risks and benefits of any such changes to the UK Public Service Broadcasting system?*

No change needed

*31 August 2021*