

Written evidence submitted by What Next?

Submission to the DCMS Select Committee The Future of Public Broadcasting

19/06/20

Regulation: Are the current regulations and obligations placed on PSBs, in return for benefits such as prominence and public funding, proportionate? What (if any regulation) should be introduced for SVoDs and other streaming services?

1. PSBs should collect **data on preferences from all licence fee payers in order to shape their content and output formats**. This should be collected, published and promoted on an annual basis to demonstrate the evidential logic behind strategic decisions, along with a framework for showing the balance between preferential data and charter responsibilities to serve the broadest possible public.

Representation: How would representation be protected if changes were made to the PSB model? How would the nations and regions be affected by changes to the PSB model? Is the 'quota' system the most efficient way to maintain and improve representation in broadcasting?

2. **Prior to any changes in policy for the delivery of PSB there should be meaningful engagement with communities who opt for streaming platforms**. These conversations must move beyond gatekeepers who don't represent the views of millions of culturally diverse communities. This engagement will provide evidence around what people are currently engaging with, what the drivers are and how PSB can become more representative and accessible.
3. There continues to be a lack of diverse representation in broadcasting. PSBs should be held to account in ensuring the content they produce is **addressing equality and diversity issues that are relevant to the lives of the population**. This should be done without stereotype and with sensitivity reflecting intersectionality and depth of lived experience.
4. PSBs need to **diversify those who are responsible for programming** so that those making these decisions are representative, risk taking and informed. This will support the quantity and quality of diverse programming. To facilitate structural change, any PSB channel should be required to keep statistics on diversity, to monitor them and to report back annually on how to advance objectives in development plans.

Accessibility: How would changes to the PSB model affect the accessibility of services? How would a wholly internet-based service compare to the current PSB model?

5. A PSB model that enables **free access to all** is crucial to ensure widespread social and cultural impact delivering universality and scale. A shift away from broad public funding to

a subscription model would invalidate the public service responsibility and severely reduce accessibility, paving the way to a subsequent downscaling of the broadcaster and likely eventual disappearance, damaging the health of democracy in broadcasting.

6. 5 million people in the UK don't have access to the internet and many households only have one device and access to the internet via external supply. Therefore, the **reach of TV and Radio is crucial for those who don't have easy access to unlimited wifi**. The current model of PSB spanning TV, radio and digital strengthens accessibility for all.

Impact: What value, if any, do PSBs bring to the UK in terms of economic (local and national), cultural and societal impact?

7. The provision of **trusted and reliable news and information is essential for a well functioning democracy with an informed public**. PSBs in the UK offer a high standard of ethically sourced news from trained journalists without which people would be ill informed and less well placed to have a voice in a democratic society.
8. **Popular programming with a public purpose explores our national identity** and shared values as a nation. The proliferation of soaps, documentaries, drama, childrens' programming, entertainment and reality shows, made by us, for us and about us, are topical and act as a conduit for our national conversation. However, additional funding will be needed to sustain the quality and breadth of output.
9. **Open access to the educational value available through PSBs** is a direct investment in the educational attainment levels of the population, which has a direct effect on productivity levels throughout people's lifetimes. If this support for educational and intellectual stimulation is threatened, then the UK can expect to see its GDP, its global influence, and its levels of equality all decline in the coming decades. One of the most consistent and influential tools at the UK's disposal is its soft power, which is built and maintained by its culture. PSBs hold the most significant non-governmental position in this area and **preserve the democratic principles of equality of access, education and opportunity**.
10. PSBs play a significant role in **upholding and developing British popular culture**. In this post Brexit-era our soft power, upheld by our culture, will play a pivotal role in securing our future global diplomacy.
11. The lack of commercial interest ensures that the position of non-commercial PSBs is more **in line with the public's interest** which in turn has a cultural and societal impact. The BBC Asian Network, for example, competes well with commercial South Asian radio stations due to the diversity of languages, presenters, genres and topics discussed on its station.
12. PSB channels provide the broadest, most diverse and accessible **talent and professional development opportunity**, which isn't always available within the commercial sector.
13. The S4C welsh language broadcaster plays a **critical role for welsh speaking communities** and should be maintained.

Impact on the cultural and creative industries

14. Because of the license fee **BBC Arts Connects an estimated 6 million people per week with the arts**. Arts programmes should be included across all BBC services to reach different audiences.
15. **PSB is a vital part of the cultural sector ecology in the UK**. If PSB is moved or compromised the whole ecology becomes fragile. Many freelancers working in the creative industries rely on all parts of the sector including PSB.
16. The Creative Industries now make up about 6% of our national economy, and are growing rapidly. The screen industries account for about a fifth of the sector and the **PSB companies are a cornerstone of the Creative Industries**.
17. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, whilst theatres and other arts venues have been closed, **PSBs have played a key role for the arts and cultural sector in reaching audiences** ensuring wide access to cultural content across the country.

Looking ahead: What should a PSB look like in a digital age? What services should they provide, and to whom? In what way, and to whom, should they be accountable? Is the term 'public service broadcasting' still relevant and, if not, what is a suitable alternative?

18. The future of PSB should comprise a **broad offer with analogue channels** maintained for those without digital access.
19. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, **a broad universal offer with widespread access is crucial to maintaining equality of access** for those most acutely impacted by the crisis.
20. The term 'public service broadcasting' is perhaps more relevant than ever and provides a **universal offer to all, increasing accessibility and diversity** across audiences.
21. OFCOM should continue to **consult with the public** on their viewing habits to inform any changes to the current PSB mandate.
22. PSBs no longer control their means of distribution and all programmes are distributed by platforms that are mostly foreign owned. **We need legislation to guarantee carriage of PSB, prominence and fair value for its transmission**.
23. The following areas of regulation and governance need to be updated to make the balance between PSB obligations and benefits proportionate :
 - PSB Prominence regulation should be platform neutral and apply to hardware
 - It should be flexible to allow for technological changes and ensure prominence is transparent, so it is clear why content is promoted.
 - Fair value must be paid for PSB content by all platforms and carriage obligations must be maintained.
 - Advertising regulation should be platform neutral.

- The Broadcasting Code should apply to all content on podcasting platforms, SVoD, BVoD and DTT.
- The UK should remain a signatory of the ECTT and on the Council of Europe after Brexit. The AVMSD 30% European origination quota for SVoDs should be enshrined in UK legislation.
- SVoDs and online platforms should be included in all Ofcom analyses of the broadcasting market.

Looking ahead: Funding

24. **The existing model of funding should be maintained**, if not increased, free from private direction or overt market influence. As a vital public service, there is no other way to ensure that quality and consistency of service is delivered to the public.
25. **Streaming platforms contribution to the UK audiovisual economy.** A Content Fund for the PSBs should be created, funded by a levy on SVoDs and online platforms however this must be **additional to TV licence income**.
26. **Governance.** An independent body should be established, with representation of all sectors of society. This body would oversee the BBC mandate, the level of the licence fee, and monitor its implementation and make further recommendations.

About What Next?

<http://www.whatnextculture.co.uk/>

1. What Next? brings people together to debate and shape the future of arts and culture in the UK
2. We are the only, free-to-access national movement that brings together both freelancers, and small and large organisations to debate and shape the future of the arts and culture in the UK.
3. We work to:
 - facilitate conversations with each other, politicians, funders, partners, activists and the public
 - build knowledge, relationships and resilience in the arts and cultural sector
 - lobby for the arts and culture, creating collective responses to policy proposals and national and local strategies
 - create national campaigns and collective resources to affect the things the movement cares about.
4. We are comprised of 30 chapters operating across the UK, who each meet regularly in their own local community and together at fortnightly meetings. All are supported by a tiny core team working a total of 3.5 days a week and a Steering Group of sector leaders.

5. A range of What Next? members have responded to this Inquiry, individually and in feeding into this paper.
6. We are very happy to give further written or oral evidence on any of these matters.