

Submission to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee on the future of the BBC

I Executive Summary — BBC Royal Charter Review Submission

The BBC remains an indispensable national institution whose universality, cultural breadth and editorial independence underpin the UK's democratic, cultural and creative life. In an era defined by global platforms, fragmented audiences, misinformation and declining trust, the BBC's role is more vital—not less.

Audience data confirms its unique reach:

- **49.4 million monthly TV viewers** (BARB)
- **31.4 million weekly radio listeners** (RAJAR)

No commercial broadcaster matches this universality or breadth of public value.

Ofcom's Broadcast and On Demand Bulletins (501–538, to September 2025) show that upheld breaches overwhelmingly occur in commercial radio and commercial television. Public service broadcasters—especially the BBC—are investigated but almost never found in breach. Assertions that PSBs pose a disproportionate regulatory risk are not supported by evidence.

The BBC must remain universal, independent and properly funded. But it must also modernise its governance, strengthen representation, and deepen its support for the UK's creative economy—including underserved artforms such as jazz.

From: Chris Hodgkins Secretary, All-Party Parliamentary Jazz Group

II Submission

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of the BBC in an age of fragmentation

The BBC's purpose is more vital today than at any point in its history. In a fragmented media environment shaped by global platforms, algorithmic distribution, misinformation and declining trust, the BBC remains the UK's only universal, independent, publicly accountable broadcaster.

Its purpose must remain:

- to provide trusted, impartial news at scale
- to reflect the full diversity of the UK's nations, regions and cultures
- to sustain genres and content that commercial markets will not
- to act as a cultural engine for the UK's creative economy and soft power
- Audience data confirms this universality:
- 49.4 million monthly TV viewers (BARB)
- 31.4 million weekly radio listeners (RAJAR)

No commercial broadcaster comes close to this reach or breadth.

1.2 What the BBC's core activities will look like in ten years

In ten years, the BBC's core activities will be:

- Trusted news and verification in an environment dominated by misinformation
- UK-distinctive content that global streamers will not produce
- Local and regional storytelling as commercial provision continues to shrink
- Support for underserved genres (jazz, arts, religion, minority languages, children's content)
- Digital-first distribution, with iPlayer and audio platforms central to reach
- Cultural soft power, projecting UK creativity globally

The BBC will remain large in scope, but its value will lie in distinctiveness, not volume.

1.3 How this should be reflected in the Public Purposes

The Public Purposes should be updated to:

- Retain the existing Mission and Purposes
- Add a new Public Purpose: Supporting the Creative Economy and UK Soft Power
- The BBC is one of the UK's most powerful cultural assets
- It sustains jobs, skills, regional economies and global influence
- Strengthen the requirement to represent all audiences
- Embed commitments to underserved genres and regional production

2. Funding

2.1 Are the Green Paper funding options ambitious enough?

- No. The Green Paper underestimates:
 - the scale of digital transition
 - the cost of trusted journalism
 - the need for UK-distinctive content
 - the fragility of the creative economy
 - the global competition for talent and IP

The BBC requires stable, predictable, inflation-linked funding to fulfil its public purposes.

2.2 Arguments for keeping the licence fee

The licence fee remains the best model because:

- It preserves universality
- It protects editorial independence
- It is progressive in consumption (everyone pays the same, but wealthier households consume more)
- It is efficient (low collection cost)
- It ensures plurality in a market dominated by global platforms

The BBC's reach — 49.4m monthly TV viewers and 31.4m weekly radio listeners — demonstrates that universality still works.

2.3 Reforming the licence fee

Reforms should include:

- Linking the licence fee to CPI
- Closing loopholes around evasion
- Exploring a household media levy, as used in Germany
- Means-tested support for low-income households
- A multi-year funding settlement to protect independence

2.4 Arguments for alternative models

Advertising, subscription or hybrid models would:

undermine universality

reduce investment in UK-distinctive content

weaken impartial news

shift the BBC towards market logic

reduce plurality

International experience (e.g., Denmark, Finland) shows that moving away from licence-fee-style models risks political interference and reduced independence.

2.5 Optimising commercial activity

The BBC should:

- Expand BBC Studios' global partnerships
- Monetise archive content more effectively
- Develop new IP pipelines in drama, children's content and music
- Strengthen international distribution of UK-distinctive genres
- Ensure commercial activity supplements, not replaces, public funding

2.6 Optimising iPlayer, the Archive and IP

- Expand iPlayer's long-term rights window
- Digitise and release more of the BBC Archive
- Develop new IP frameworks that retain UK ownership
- Use the archive to support education, arts and regional storytelling

2.7 Efficiency savings

The BBC has already delivered over £1bn in savings. Further cuts risk damaging core services. Efficiency must not become a euphemism for shrinkage.

2.8 Funding the World Service

The World Service is a strategic asset and should be directly funded by Government, not the licence fee. It is essential to UK soft power and global influence.

3. Trust and Relevance

3.1 How the BBC can be more valued and trusted

- Strengthen editorial independence
- Improve workplace culture and governance
- Increase transparency in decision-making
- Deepen representation of underserved communities
- Invest in local and regional journalism

3.2 Improving engagement with audiences

- Establish permanent regional audience panels
- Expand BBC Local reporting
- Increase commissioning outside London
- Strengthen partnerships with community media

3.3 Attracting young audiences

- Expand digital-first content
- Invest in youth-led formats
- Strengthen BBC Three and BBC Sounds
- Support emerging talent across genres

4. Across the UK

4.1 Balance of activities across the UK

The BBC must:

- Increase commissioning outside London
- Strengthen regional production hubs
- Expand local news and storytelling
- Ensure decision-making is geographically distributed

4.2 Minority languages

The BBC should:

- Protect and expand Welsh, Scots, Gaelic and Ulster Scots services
- Invest in digital content for minority language communities

4.3 A representative workforce

- Strengthen recruitment pipelines across the UK
- Improve socio-economic diversity
- Support apprenticeships and early-career pathways

5. Future of Public Service Media

5.1 Media policy areas to consider

i) Relationship with UK PSB and international media

- Strengthen PSB collaboration
- Ensure fair prominence on digital platforms
- Protect UK IP from global extraction

ii) Creative Industries Sector Plan and Ofcom's Transmission Critical report

- Align BBC investment with regional creative clusters
- Ensure resilience during the transition from DTT to IP

iii) Transition to IPTV

- Guarantee universal access
- Protect vulnerable households
- Ensure prominence and discoverability

iv) Artificial Intelligence

- Use AI to support accessibility and discovery
- Protect editorial integrity
- Ensure transparency in AI-assisted journalism

6. An Independent and Accountable BBC

6.1 Independence vs obligations

The Charter Review must:

- Strengthen independence
- Clarify obligations
- Prevent political interference in editorial decisions

6.2 Governance arrangements

- Reform Board appointments to reduce political influence
- Strengthen independent non-executive oversight
- Improve transparency in decision-making

6.3 Permanent Charter

A permanent Charter could protect independence, but:

- Funding
- Governance
- Public Purposes

should remain subject to periodic review.

6.4 Accountability mechanisms

- Strengthen Ofcom's role
- Improve parliamentary scrutiny
- Expand public reporting
- **Ensure devolved nations have meaningful input**

7. Trusted News and the BBC

7.1 Accurate and impartial news

Ofcom data (Bulletins 501–538) shows:

- PSBs almost never breach the Broadcasting Code
- Upheld breaches overwhelmingly occur in commercial radio and TV
- The BBC is consistently found not in breach
- This is strong evidence of high editorial standards.

7.2 Countering misinformation

The BBC must:

- Strengthen verification
- Expand media literacy
- Use its reach to counter falsehoods
- Protect editorial independence

7.3 Supporting local news

- Expand BBC Local
- Strengthen partnerships with local media
- Invest in regional reporting and community journalism

Conclusion

The BBC is indispensable, trusted and high-performing — but it must reform, not retreat. The next Charter must:

Protect universality

Strengthen independence

Modernise governance

Support the creative economy

Deepen representation

Sustain underserved genres

Invest in regional storytelling

Ensure trusted journalism at scale

A confident, independent, culturally ambitious BBC is essential to the UK's democratic, cultural and creative future.

The author

Chris Hodgkins MBA FCIM was raised in Cardiff. In 1974 co-founded the Welsh Jazz Festival and four years later established the Welsh Jazz Society. As a trumpet player Chris toured the UK and Europe and appeared at the Sacramento Jazz Festival in the States. With his own band he made a number of television and radio appearances. Wild Bill Davison commented, "It's a hell of a good band."

He relocated to London to play professionally and in 1985, was appointed Director of Jazz Services Ltd.. He was Chair of the National Jazz Archive 2005-2014. Chris helped establish the annual Parliamentary Jazz Awards.

Chris retired from Jazz Services Ltd in May 2014 and returned to the road, the radio and the recording studio to focus on playing. Chris presents Jazz Is on Pure Jazz in New York.

Chris published a business planning manual for jazz musicians: *Where Do You Want To Be?* is available on the Online Music Business Resource as a free download at www.chrishodgkins.co.uk . Chris is secretary to the All-Party Parliamentary Jazz Group and for the Group has published papers

on streaming, Artificial Intelligence, “Cold Comfort and Home Truths”, the “Review of Jazz in England” and responded to the Baroness Margaret Hodge Review of Arts Council England. All these papers can be found at: <https://appjag.org/>