

1. Do you agree that securing plural sources of impartial news for the Nations, locally and in the regions should be a key priority?

Yes	Yes
No	

Comment (max. 4000 characters)

Plurality of news sources is of the utmost importance. But plurality alone is not enough. There is little point in having multiple regional television news services if none of them is relevant to viewers. If public money is to be used to finance regional news, it should be made clear that each of the Channel 3 regions will have its own news service which is both separate and complete. Further, this news service must be originated from within the region, and editorial control must also be exercised there. Recent regulatory decisions have greatly disadvantaged some areas of the UK which have seen a dramatic diminution in the relevance of their news coverage. Any funding solution which fails to restore what has been lost in these areas will be seen as fatally flawed, and the trials should be used as an interim method of returning a full and relevant regional news service where such a situation exists. There can be no arguable logic which trials the protection of regional news within regions which still have a relevant service whilst other audiences are already in a position where plurality has been largely or effectively lost.

2. Do you agree that sustainable, impartial news in the Nations, locally and in the regions is likely to require some top-up public funding?

Yes	Yes
No	

Comment (max. 4000 characters)

It's difficult to see how a service could be provided without public funding. The opportunities for monetising the service are small, particularly within the smaller regions, and the emphasis of a PSB service should be on the provision of an accurate, relevant and impartial news service rather than on ratings chasing and a search for other ways to make the audience pay. That model has already been shown to have failed, which is why we're in this situation. If a change is to be made, make it one which is sustainable and resistant to economic pressures. It's only by doing this that impartiality can be guaranteed. Fund it fully, with a requirement that any additional income generated from the activities be shared in an agreed manner.

3. Do you agree that the Television Licence Fee should be used to support impartial news in the Nations, locally and in the regions in addition to BBC services?

Yes	Yes
No	

Comment (max. 4000 characters)

It's a straightforward conclusion to reach. No-one would argue that the licence fee should only be used to pay for BBC 1. It pays for a range of services across a variety of media. It is entirely right and proper that it should be used to fund the provision of regional news, a clear public service, whichever channel it is on. However, it's important that such public funding should give no commercial advantage to the broadcaster within whose schedule the PSB output is contained. A successful evening news programme can deliver a significant audience into the evening schedule. Consideration should be given to mechanisms which regularise the situation, perhaps by levying a charge-back where delivered audiences exceed a threshold level. Mandatory promotion of regional news output should also be required. Similarly, it must be shown to be clear that the funding is not merely a subsidy for the broadcaster. Accordingly, Channel 3 franchisees should be excluded from membership of any consortium and of having any commercial interest in it.

4. Do you agree that any funding within a contained contestable element of the television licence fee not required for impartial news should potentially be available to fund other forms of essential public service content, or should such funding be limited to news?

Yes	Yes
No	

Comment (max. 4000 characters)

A qualified yes. Recent years have seen the virtual abandonment of regional non-news output. Many would argue that it was no accident these programmes had become unpopular in many regions, since they had descended into an amorphous mass of blue light and lifestyle programmes which displayed little, if any, of the distinctiveness of the region they should have been reflecting. The use of PSB funding to enable the production of meaningful programmes which act as a lens on a region would allow its distinctive nature to be preserved. Without them there is a danger that, in some places, regional identity will be diminished or lost. However, the content to which funding is applied should be restricted initially to regional television, the area of broadcasting most disadvantaged by recent events, and therefore most in need of protection and restoration. As convergence continues, a review of the application of this funding would likely be necessary to take account of social and technology evolution.

5. Are there alternative funding mechanisms that you believe would deliver the above objectives more effectively?

Yes	
No	No

Comment (max. 4000 characters)

Only public funding or regulation can ensure that broadcasters serve their audiences in an appropriate manner. Recent history has shown what happens in a multi-channel market when profits come under pressure. The digital revolution has certainly provided increased choice. But the reality of that choice is unpalatable for many, does little to stimulate the audience, and perpetuates a situation where editorial values are at lowest common denominator levels. Since light touch regulation allows for a continuing rise in the number of channels a finite advertising spend must be shared amongst, it can only damage the creation of anything other than the most populist content. Public funding is the single reliable method of protecting programming which is deemed to be worthy of it.

6. Do you agree with the proposal to set a maximum percentage of Television Licence Fee revenue which could be set aside as a contained contestable element?

Yes	Yes
No	

Comment (max. 4000 characters)

I agree that, as an initial foray into facing the commercial challenges of the digital age, a maximum percentage should be set. However, there needs to be a debate over which areas of broadcasting should be publicly funded in future, and there can be little to commend the current monopoly the BBC enjoys. Its use of licence fee money distorts the market, and there is no reason why a portion of the fee should not, for example, be used to fund a new channel which mirrors the regional diversity and aspirations of Independent Television in its earlier days - a federal system along the lines of the US PBS channels, but adequately sustained by the licence fee. This would have the added benefit of allowing any incumbents who wish to be freed from their PSB obligations to move on.

7. Do you agree that amending the BBC Agreement could provide the necessary protection to the BBC's future funding and independence?

Yes	Yes
No	

Comment (max. 4000 characters)

The importance of an independent BBC is critical. The same is true of its funding. But what should not be seen as a given right is automatic access to the same level of funding as that which it currently enjoys. The organisation displays an arrogance which belies its public status. Who, for example, decided that the BBC should run 8 national television channels, 10 national radio stations and dominate areas of the online world? The BBC imbalances UK content in so many ways that a debate over how public money is used to fund broadcasting in its various converging forms is

required urgently. Perhaps there is a need for a new body - certainly not Ofcom - to decide which public services receive public funding. So, yes; protect the principle that the BBC should be funded. But do it in such a way that reminds the broadcaster that it's our money, and that we will have a say in how it's spent, and importantly, by whom.

8. Do you agree that the use of any contained contestable element within the Television Licence Fee should be restricted to the public purposes set out in the BBC Charter?

Yes	Yes
No	

Comment (max. 4000 characters)

Absolutely yes. If there is a desire to fund other purposes then raise money through a tax, levy or other device for that purpose. Do not denude an industry which is already producing, in many areas, a public service output ranging from barely acceptable to barely existing by using money which could be used to support defined aims for other purposes. To do so would be entirely against the expectation of licence fee payers.