

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	✓
No	

Comment (max. 4000 characters)

Ofcom's research, as part of the Review of Public Service Broadcasting, shows that people in Northern Ireland value local news and current affairs programming more than any other region of the UK. Strong audience demand and competition has led to both BBC and UTV providing news and current affairs coverage that is perceived to be of a high quality here.

It must be recognised that the political and historic landscape in NI is very different from any other UK region. Whilst much progress has been made Northern Ireland remains a divided society. Impartial regional news but importantly non-news current affairs programming is perceived by viewers in NI as of vital importance – and as such these areas of public service content provide an essential forum for debate and in turn a sense of identity.

Hence, whilst it is imperative that plurality of impartial regional news provision is accorded priority the Department is of the view that it is essential that DCMS consider fully the particular needs of and priorities for NI (which differ to those of other UK regions) and that action is now taken to ensure plurality of current affairs programming. DCAL regard this area of public service content as a key priority.

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	✓
No	

Comment (max. 4000 characters)

Ofcom's research as part of the Review of PSB has demonstrated that the broadcasting environment is undergoing a period of significant change and that a continuation of the existing system for provision of certain aspects of public service content is highly unlikely to be sustainable. Going forward, the provision of impartial news in the nations, locally and in the regions will clearly require additional public funding. However, we would note that there are subtle variations to the key issues facing each region/nation in this regard. At the present time the sustainability of regional news provision appears more certain in NI than may be the case in other nations. However, we would note that this could change quickly and that NI cannot be complacent in this regard. As outlined in our response to Q1 above a key concern for NI is to

ensure the continued provision of impartial and plural sources of current affairs programming. This is an area where NI would also benefit from top-up public funding to ensure plurality of provision.

Therefore, DCAL is requesting that the pilot programme for IFNC's for regional news should be extended to reflect the issues impacting on NI, to include NI as a pilot region but with a broader focus in NI to include/test the market for current affairs programming also.

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)

DCAL recognize that the purpose of the TV Licence Fee is to provide a transparent, large scale funding mechanism to support the provision of public service content. Use of the licence fee to support impartial news in the Nations, locally and in the regions, in addition to BBC services, is therefore entirely consistent with this overall aim. However, DCAL also take view that in the same way use of the licence fee to support current affairs programming is also consistent with the purpose of the TV Licence Fee.

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)

Ofcom's research as part of its PSB Review has indicated that there is a risk to the provision of other forms of PSC as well as regional news – ie current affairs, children's, arts programming and religious programmes. Given the particular issues in this regard which NI faces (ie in relation to current affairs programming) DCAL would wish to ensure that an element of any funding within a contained contestable element of the television licence fee should be available for other forms of essential public service content where there is a clear risk to continued provision.

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

Yes	
No	No

Comment (max. 4000 characters)

Ofcom's review of PSB identified a number of potential funding sources which might be used to deliver the above objectives but it is clear that in reality few of these are viable options. Therefore, DCAL view the current proposal (ie to fund through the TV licence fee) as the preferred option.

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)

For the reasons outlined in the consultation document (ie to protect the BB's security and independence) there is clearly a need to set a maximum percentage of television licence fee revenue for use as a contained contestable element. However, a condition should be imposed that this percentage is reviewed periodically eg at the end of each two year period to ensure that the needs of audiences are continuing to be met. .

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)

Whilst it appears that this is the most appropriate approach this is really a matter for Ofcom/legal experts who are best placed to advise on the possible implications of any such decision.

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)

Whilst DCAL agrees that the use of any contained contestable element should be required to fall within the public purposes which govern the BBC's use of the television licence fee it is important to note that concerns have been expressed in NI (and in other regions) as to the extent to which the BBC has delivered on some of the stated public purposes eg representing the UK, its nations, regions and communities. Therefore, there may be a need to consider whether some amendments are required – such as adequate/proportionate representation of the UK, its nations, regions and communities or stimulating creativity and cultural excellence throughout the UK and in its nations/regions etc.