

Musicians' Union

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A response from the Musicians' Union to the Digital Britain consultation on sustainable independent impartial news

1. The Musicians' Union (MU) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the discussions surrounding the funding of public service broadcasting.
2. The MU has over 30,000 members who work as full or part-time professional musicians. Virtually all of our members will interface with the BBC at some time during their careers and the BBC remains the single largest employer of professional musicians in Europe.
3. Our response to this consultation touches on a number of the questions posed, but focuses on the areas that may directly affect the professional activities of our members.
4. In addition to submitting our own response, the MU would like to support the submissions made by our colleagues from the other entertainment unions.

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?

5. We would strongly argue against the use of the Television Licence Fee to support impartial news because we are against any redeployment of the BBC's resources. We believe that the BBC is and should remain the cornerstone of public service broadcasting and that it should retain sole use of the Television Licence Fee money.
6. We do not support the idea that money currently being used for digitisation by the BBC should be taken away from it. We believe that after digitisation, this money should go towards benefiting the high quality programming that the BBC is known for. This would be an ideal opportunity to remedy some of the funding issues that the BBC has had as a result of the last below inflation licence fee settlement. We also believe that the strong link between the BBC and the licence fee would be broken if any of this money were to be used to fund third parties or impartial news in the Nations, locally and in the regions.

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?

7. As we have already said, we do not support any use of the Television Licence Fee for any purpose other than BBC funding. We believe that if this was done, even with a relatively small percentage of the licence fee, that this would be a dangerous first step towards taking away larger amounts of money from the BBC in future.
8. The BBC is the biggest single employer of MU members in the UK and is in the unique position of supporting five full-time orchestras and the BBC Singers, the only full-time professional choir in the UK. The BBC orchestras alone employ 382 contract musicians and many hundreds more on a free-lance basis. The BBC issues over 42,000 contracts to musicians every year and almost all MU members will be engaged with some aspect of the BBC at one stage of their career. Any reduction in the scope or funding of the BBC would therefore impact negatively on the employment of musicians.
9. The BBC (including BBC Worldwide) spends approximately £125 million per year on music including musicians, composers, orchestras and collecting societies. The BBC Proms is the main live classical music event in the UK featuring over 100 concerts per year and the BBC 'Young Musician of the Year' has supported the development of classical musicianship in the UK for over 30 years.
10. The BBC is also by far the main primary commissioner of new music in the UK and it should be supported to continue to present new music in exciting and innovative ways. The BBC produces landmark music programming across BBC Two, BBC Four and Radio 3, such as Charles Hazlewood's The Birth of British Music on BBC Two. The BBC is a promoter of live events including Radio 1 Big Weekend and The Electric Proms and also provides broadcast and online coverage of other major festivals including Glastonbury, T in the Park, Reading, Leeds and Cambridge Folk Festival across all platforms.
11. It is also an important promoter of new and unsigned artists via 'BBC Introducing' which provides a stage for emerging music talent at festivals across the UK such as Glastonbury and T in the Park. The BBC has always had a strong tradition of investing in talent, and it is vital that it retains the funds to be able to continue to do so.
12. The MU would also like to stress the vital cultural role played by the BBC radio stations, which often get overlooked in discussions about public service broadcasting. Without the BBC's presence on analogue radio, there would be very little quality cultural provision and the promotion of music would suffer greatly. It also contributes massively in terms of innovative and progressive programming in the digital arena. The BBC spent £130.8 million in 2008 across Radio 1, Radio 2, Radio 3, Classical, 1Xtra, 6Music and Asian Network.

13. The importance of the BBC as a global brand and, consequently, its export power for much of the creative sector must also not be overlooked. The BBC needs to be of sufficient size to fulfil this role and we must not weaken it domestically.

Are there alternative funding mechanisms that you believe would deliver the previous objectives more effectively?

14. We believe that there are alternative funding models that have not been sufficiently investigated as a source of funding for the future provision of public service content beyond the BBC, including news.
15. We would support research into the potential contribution that could be made to PSB funding from industry levies collected from organisations such as cable and satellite broadcasters or internet service providers (ISPs), which benefit from public service content. We would support this research with the caveat that any such levies should not interfere with other levy systems that are intended to benefit the rights' holders. The MU would, for example, object to levies on consumer hardware that would fund public service broadcasters to the exclusion of levies that are intended to provide income to the creators and performers, such as European private copy levies.
16. We would also support investigations into the possibility of funding public service content beyond the BBC by direct public funding, as long as this remained entirely separated from the licence fee. The MU does, however, believe that the current economic climate does not favour this funding option.
17. We would not support any funding of public service broadcasting through the use of National Lottery money after 2012. The partial funding of the Olympics through National Lottery money has already had a significant detrimental effect on funding for the Arts, and using National Lottery funds to finance public service broadcasting after 2012 would prevent this money from being directed back into the Arts. In addition to this concern, we also believe that National Lottery funding is too precarious a funding model for public service broadcasting, since it is impossible to make long term guarantees about the future existence of the National Lottery.

Conclusion

18. Our primary concern remains the protection of core BBC funding. In addition to the employment opportunities that the BBC provides for musicians, we also believe that it has been instrumental in bringing music to the masses. The BBC plays a crucial role in audience building for music, and it is no exaggeration to say that many first experience the thrill of live performance by listening to the BBC. It should be encouraged to maintain and enhance this role.