

Performers' Alliance Parliamentary Group



Chair: Janet Anderson MP

Vice-Chairs: John Hemming MP (Lib Dem), Peter Luff MP (Con), Lord Brian Rix (Lords), Peter Wishart MP (SNP)

Secretary: Neil Gerrard MP

Ben Bradshaw MP,
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport
Department for Culture Media & Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London SW1Y 5DH

21st September 2009

Dear Secretary of State,

Re: DCMS' Consultation on sustainable, independent and impartial news in the Nations, locally and in the regions

I am writing on behalf of the Performers' Alliance Parliamentary Group regarding the DCMS Consultation on sustainable, independent and impartial news in the Nations, locally and in the regions.

Our group was established to work alongside the trade unions of the Performers' Alliance (Equity, the Musicians' Union and the Writers' Guild of Great Britain) and has been active on a range of issues that affect the members of these organisations and those working in the broadcasting and entertainment industries.

The Group would like to register our strong opposition to the proposal to top-slice the BBC Licence fee, as a means of funding new provision beyond the BBC.

The Performers' Alliance has an interest in a healthy system of public service broadcasting with original production from a range of providers. Whilst we understand the crisis facing journalism, we feel that it is important to emphasise that public service broadcasting encompasses more than simply news provision. The BBC remains one of the most important sources of home-grown TV production and quality content - which is not only essential in meeting the demands of audiences but is also the nation's most significant employers of actors, writers, musicians and creative talent, and the main provider of education and training.

In particular, the BBC issues over 42,000 contracts to musicians every year and along with BBC Worldwide, spends approximately £125 million per year on music including musicians, composers, orchestras and collecting societies. There is also a pressing need to protect and prioritise the production of drama, comedy and entertainment which reflects the lives of the UK population. Unfortunately many performers believe that quality drama on television is on the decline - that the single TV drama is all but dead, proper rehearsal is almost unheard of and that great TV programmes are becoming a rarity.

Simeon Andrews Coordinator, Performers' Alliance Parliamentary Group
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The BBC therefore plays a key role as the cornerstone of PSB, providing a broad range of programming for audiences and supporting the creative industries. It should be, now more than ever, equipped to provide high quality broadcasting in the digital age. Siphoning-off money from the License Fee not only challenges the unique accountability of the corporation to the License Fee payer but will undermine the broadcaster's capacity leading to a further decline in the quality and quantity of original UK production.

Sharing or "top slicing" of the licence fee and undermining the BBC must be rejected, as it fundamentally provides no extra revenue. Instead, we urge the Government to consider more creative funding suggestions for public service content in media other than the BBC, as laid out in 'Mind the Funding Gap: the potential of industry levies for continued funding of public service broadcasting', the report commissioned by BECTU and NUJ.

I hope that you find these comments useful and will take these concerns into consideration. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue with you directly and would therefore like to invite you to meet with a small delegation from the Group, or for you to attend a full Group meeting if you would prefer. The meetings are informal and would provide for a constructive dialogue and exchange of views with members of the Group and officers of the unions.

I would be grateful if your office would liaise with our parliamentary co-ordinator, Simeon Andrews (details below) who will make whatever arrangements are necessary for such a meeting.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Neil Gerrard".

NEIL GERRARD MP
Secretary