

## Personal Details

Fields marked \* must be complete

Full name*	Tony Watson
Organisation*	Press Association
Email address* <b>Important: A working email address is required.</b>	tony.watson@pressassociation.com

In the spirit of Freedom of Information, we would like to publish your response.

Are you happy for your contribution to be published? Please indicate Yes or No	Yes
---	-----

If No, in brief please state your reasons why. (max 800 characters)

--

The Department may receive a Freedom of Information request for any correspondence we receive at any time. If you have reasons for your correspondence to remain confidential please state them and they will be taken into account when the department considers how to respond to any such request.

Are you happy for your name and e-mail address to be released on request? Please indicate Yes or No	Yes
--	-----

Your rights under the Data Protection Act 1998 are not affected.

We also reserve the right not to publish responses if we consider that their content is defamatory.

**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	x
No	

Comment (max. 4000 characters)

Plurality of news plays a vital role in sustaining the engagement of citizens in an informed democracy. Research into this issue by Ofcom, the BBC and others has consistently shown that the public place a high value on the availability of broadcast regional news from more than one source. The Press Association supports the proposed independently funded news consortia model as a possible vehicle for achieving this.

However, resolving the immediate issue of preserving regional broadcast news on Channel 3 will not be enough to safeguard plurality of regional and local news provision in a multimedia world.

In the traditional news pyramid model, regional and national broadcasters rely on trusted contributions from local reporters and news organisations who invest at a local level. Many news stories are originated locally before being picked up by national and regional media. This relationship is under threat from the same commercial pressures facing the broadcast providers. Local and regional newspapers are facing structural and cyclical change and seeing advertising revenues and readership fall away.

Our research has shown that there has already been a significant reduction in the coverage of local public institutions including councils and courts. If urgent action is not taken to address this problem, we could see these organisations operating without proper, impartial public scrutiny.

At a time when public subsidy is being considered for maintaining plurality in regional television news, there is case for some creative thinking about how to support the role currently performed by other regional media in safeguarding democratic accountability.

We urge the government to increase remit of review to public service news on all platforms.

The news industry needs to create a supply structure in line with how the public consumes news today. This will include digital and social media platforms as well as newspapers, broadcast and radio. It will also include regional broadcast news with a more granular, local footprint - giving communities access to the information which involves and affects them.

**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	x
No	

Comment (max. 4000 characters)

It would be extremely challenging to provide an IFNC solution without some level of public subsidy. The potential deficit in this service has been caused by the financial challenges faced by ITV and the decreasing value of the spectrum. Even with an upturn in advertising revenues following the end of the recession, commercial viability looks uncertain.

The proposed multi-platform approach for the IFNCs will enable efficiencies and cost-saving in newsgathering without compromising quality. In addition, it will deliver significant cross-platform promotional benefits.

However, until a new business model emerges, public support or pump priming will be necessary.

**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	x
No	

Comment (max. 4000 characters)

As outlined above, plurality in the provision of local and regional news is essential and a level of public funding has become necessary to safeguard its future. The licence fee is the most obvious source of public funding for this need. The aims and values of any regional news service fit closely with the public purposes already in place for the BBC's use of the licence fee.

In addition, we believe there are many ways in which the BBC could work with the industry to provide value to local and regional media.

The BBC could support plurality by outsourcing a percentage of its newsgathering operation to commercial providers. This model could see the BBC contributing to core video newsgathering by an agency, which also supplies video content to local and regional media companies, providing better value to the BBC and licence fee payers.

Other potential areas for knowledge sharing and collaborative working could include sharing audience and usability research, sharing online usage data, developing solutions on technical infrastructure and developing common standards for metadata and tagging.

**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	
No	X

Comment (max. 4000 characters)

The scale of the current challenge facing news provision at a local and regional level is so profound that any available public funding should be limited to safeguarding its future. News is consistently rated as the most important public service purpose by audiences and the Government has a democratic obligation to preserve it.

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

Yes	
No	X

Comment (max. 4000 characters)

As outlined above, some element of public funding will be required to secure a future source of regional news on Channel 3. The TV Licence Fee is the most obvious source at least while new business models are emerging to top up public money. This could include making advertising minutage around the bulletins available to the consortia.

**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	X
No	

Comment (max. 4000 characters)

Setting a maximum percentage of licence fee revenue for a contestable element is an appropriate reassurance for the BBC to be able to plan ahead with confidence.

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

Yes	x
No	

Comment (max. 4000 characters)

--

**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	x
No	

Comment (max. 4000 characters)

Maintaining the public's confidence in the licence fee system should be an essential factor in any top slicing plan. By restricting use of money to the public purposes set out in the Charter the consistency would be retained. The public purposes of sustaining citizenship and civil society and representing the UK in its regions and communities would be central values for any regional or local news service.
--