

We at Quadrant are confident that we could form a consortium or consortia with other relevant media businesses in both England and Wales that would meet the essential criteria for joining the pilots, and would seek to be considered as a provider.

If the funding of sustainable impartial news is to be accepted as an appropriate use of the Television Licence fee, it is vital that this is a contestable process from the beginning and not seen as a direct subsidy to ITV.

Quadrant's response to the specific questions in the DCMS consultation is as follows:

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. As well as the benefits that competition brings to the quality and impartiality of news, it is likely that if these programmes were lost on one of the most popular channels (i.e. ITV/Channel 3) many viewers would simply no longer regularly watch news about their nation, locality or region.

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. In theory ITV could be simply required to finance such programmes, at least for a few more years, as a licence requirement. However, in 2008 ITV made it clear that if Ofcom did not agree to a cut in the number of English regional news programmes, a similar financial saving would be achieved through across the board cuts, leading to reduced quality, smaller audiences and a decline in meaningful competition and plurality. That threat will continue to hang over news in the nations and regions until contestable public funding is in place.

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. The BBC, funded by the licence fee, has brought many benefits to British television. However, its dominant position as Britain's most lavishly funded broadcaster goes a long way to explain why there is not the vibrant competition in regional and local news, with a multiplicity of commercial stations on the American model. It is therefore appropriate that a measure to ameliorate the anti-competitive effect of the BBC is financed from the 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. In particular in the wider field of current affairs and other factual programming, especially in the devolved nations.

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

No. It is important that the source of funding is at arm's length from Government. It is not likely that any other tax or levy would be as clearly separate from general taxation.

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?

No. There is no reason why decisions on the amount needed in future to fund plurality in news and other provision should be linked in this way to decisions about the future size and shape of the BBC.

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

Yes. However, this should be part of any future consideration about the structure of the BBC and should not be a prerequisite to using the Television Licence fee to fund contestable services.

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?

No. There should be defined public purposes for the contestable element but these need not be the same as the role given to the BBC under a renewed charter.

We hope that our response is of value to you in your considerations, and offer ourselves for any future discussions or consultations you deem appropriate. We would also seek to be considered as a provider of contestably funded news in both Wales and England.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colin Stevens', written in a cursive style.

Colin Stevens
Deputy Chief Executive