

Consultation response

The new Culture Secretary the Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP has made it clear that the licence fee is unfair and should be removed.

National World is the publisher of hundreds of regional newspapers and websites across the UK including The Scotsman and The Yorkshire Post. Our argument is consistent - it is unfair to use a forced tax to dominate a commercial sector and severely constrain diversity and consumer choice.

There is a need to level up the media - otherwise local publishers will increasingly go out of business because of the calculated and predatory behaviour of this publicly funded competitor. The BBC speaks with one voice, directed from the centre, whereas local people and local editors independently drive products that genuinely reflect the differences in communities.

It would be considered unthinkable for the BBC to launch local newspapers that contained no advertising, had no cover price, were of limitless pagination and consequently offered a premium user experience, in markets served by traditional, commercial publishers. But this is what they are effectively doing by continuing to invest in local news websites in direct competition to commercial news organisations which cannot offer the same UX and upload speeds because of the advertising they carry to sustain their journalism.

To support long-term sustainability of local, regional and national news, the Operating Licence should ensure:

1. The BBC should withdraw the proposals set out in its 'Across the UK' plan. At the same time, it must go much further and reduce its market share in online news to below 25 per cent which is the usual measure of a monopoly. This can be achieved by restricting BBC online content to that which supports its broadcast output.
2. Provide a level playing field which is impossible all the time the BBC continues to seek to dominate the local news online arena.
3. Limit soft news, comment and analysis (e.g., human interest and entertainment stories, long reads, etc.).
4. Improve communication of BBC plans inside and outside of the BBC's Annual Plan.
5. Withdraw BBC News Daily email which directly competes with commercial alternatives.