

Your response

Overview

We welcome the opportunity to respond to Ofcom's call for input on UK preparations for the World Radiocommunication Conference 2023 (WRC-23). Our response is focused on Section 5: Broadcast TV & Support Applications.

The British Broadcasting Challenge is a small group of media academics, writers and producers who are aware of the challenges facing public service broadcasting. We have two aims.

Firstly, to promote a wide-ranging discussion about the future of UK public service broadcasting – its potential for good, its ability to transmit truth, its institutional place at the heart of the UK and how it can be improved for the digital age.

Secondly, to ensure that this debate is accountable to parliament and the public, that is open and transparent and not conducted behind closed doors.

The British Broadcasting Challenge launched in May 2021 with an open letter to the Secretary of State for Digital, Media, Culture and Sport asking for an open, genuine and transparent debate on the future of public service broadcasting. This was signed by more than 120 public figures including Sir David Attenborough, and the full letter can be read on our website.

Our organisation might not usually respond on this topic but it is becoming very clear that this conference has implications for the future of Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) services. These TV services are important to the people we represent and we would like Ofcom to ensure they continue in their current form.

Our position

We are advocating for a 'no change' position on WRC-23 agenda item 1.5 "*Review of the frequency band 470-960 MHz with potential IMT identification*". Decisions taken at this World Radiocommunication Conference will have a lasting and wide-ranging impact on UK broadcasting.

Our main priority is the future of DTT, which uses the 470-694 MHz spectrum band. 'No change' would protect DTT's continued use of the spectrum and we strongly encourage Ofcom to build an international consensus for this position to represent the UK's interests robustly on the world stage.

DTT holds an important place in the heart of Britons. Recent research from Ipsos has found that more than half (56%) of British adults have watched Freeview via an aerial in the past year. Further, well over three-quarters (87%) have listened to broadcast radio services – which share the same infrastructure as DTT – in the past year.¹ Broadcast TV and radio are a

¹ Ipsos (2022). *The Importance of Digital Terrestrial Television and Broadcast Radio*
https://www.argiva.com/Importance_of_Broadcast.pdf

critical national asset, allowing us to enjoy experiences like the Jubilee, Glastonbury or Euro 2022 together as a nation.

The case for DTT services

DTT and radio services delivered via an aerial enjoy broad support, across all age groups and regions. Research undertaken by Ipsos on behalf of Arqiva shows that 90% of adults believe broadcast services should continue to be supported. More than 8 in 10 (85%) believe government or local MPs should actively support continued provision of these services.² A significant change in the UK's spectrum arrangements could put these services at risk.

We believe that everyone should have access to the high quality and diverse programming that broadcast TV and radio provides, regardless of their income, the level of their digital skill, where they live or their age. Many who rely on broadcast TV and radio are often those who have the least: the lonely, the poor, the elderly, the vulnerable and the disconnected. According to the Ipsos report, a quarter of people (25%) agreed that they would be “very lonely” if they lost their Freeview service via an aerial, rising to 44% of those who are 65 and older and living alone.

DTT is free at the point of use – delivering a diverse range of content, including public service broadcasting. This provides access to affordable and reliable programming that has a clear impact on personal wellbeing and community cohesion, including in the most rural of communities. At a time when streaming subscriptions are starting to plateau because of cost pressures, this offers great value for money.

Now the UK has left the European Union, WRC-23 is an opportunity for Ofcom and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to take a leading role in discussions and decision-making and garner support amongst other member nations for a ‘no change’ position.

Conclusion

The British Broadcasting Challenge is delighted to respond to this call for input and looks forward to working with Ofcom as you continue your preparations for WRC-23. It is important that the right decisions are taken at the Conference and that Ofcom protects the UK's interests by safeguarding the future of DTT and radio broadcasting for decades to come. We would like to reiterate our support for a ‘no change’ position on the ‘review of the frequency band 470-960 MHz with potential IMT identification’.

² Ipsos (2022). *The Importance of Digital Terrestrial Television and Broadcast Radio*
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