



Response to

BBC PUBLIC CONSULTATION

AGE-RELATED TV POLICY DOCUMENT

February 2019

ASP Submission to BBC Public Consultation on Age Related TV Licence Policy

Introduction

Age Sector Platform (ASP) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the BBC's consultation on its future age-related TV licence policy. The free TV licence for the over 75's serves as a major contributor to the health and wellbeing, enjoyment and 'friendship' for thousands of older people throughout the United Kingdom on a daily basis.

Accordingly ASP believes the government should take back responsibility for funding free TV licences for the over 75s as part of an overall strategy to combat the growing problem of loneliness and isolation among older people.

Background

Age Sector Platform, which was established in 2008, is a charity which supports older people to have their say on the issues that matter most to their lives. The organisation has a membership base of 34 older people's organisations and networks which represent approximately 200,000 older people across Northern Ireland.

Age Sector Platform also runs the Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament (NIPP) each year which surveys pensioners from across each county to identify their key areas of concern. Since the NIPP was established in 2011 it has held engagement events in thirty two different locations across Northern Ireland, conducted over 5,000 surveys and held seven two-day parliaments where over one hundred motions have been passed by Members of the Pensioners Parliament (MPPs).

Consultation Documentation

Age Sector Platform wishes to express its concern at the documentation distributed by the BBC to 'assist' those wishing to make a submission to the consultation process. On this point we are referring to the 'Review of the Over-75S Funding document prepared by Frontier economics on behalf of the BBC and the BBC's Age-Related TV Licence Policy document. In addition, the BBC's 'Our questions' document, asking those considering making a submission to the process their views about three options: **copying**, **restoring** and **reforming** the free TV licence. This could be misconstrued by many older people and others that their only option in the consultation process is to choose one of the three options outlined in the said document thus, risking the accusation of 'leading' the consultation process in a particular direction.

Furthermore, the Frontier economics document contains 88 pages while the BBC's age-related document contains 54 pages. One would envisage a very small number of older people would read the full contents of the documents concerned.

In addition, these documents are confined to looking at the major financial problem the BBC will have, come 2020, and the difficult choices it may have to make when the UK Government's responsibility for covering the cost of concessionary TV licences for the over 75s comes to an end in June 2020.

Why concessionary TV licences for the over 75s should be retained

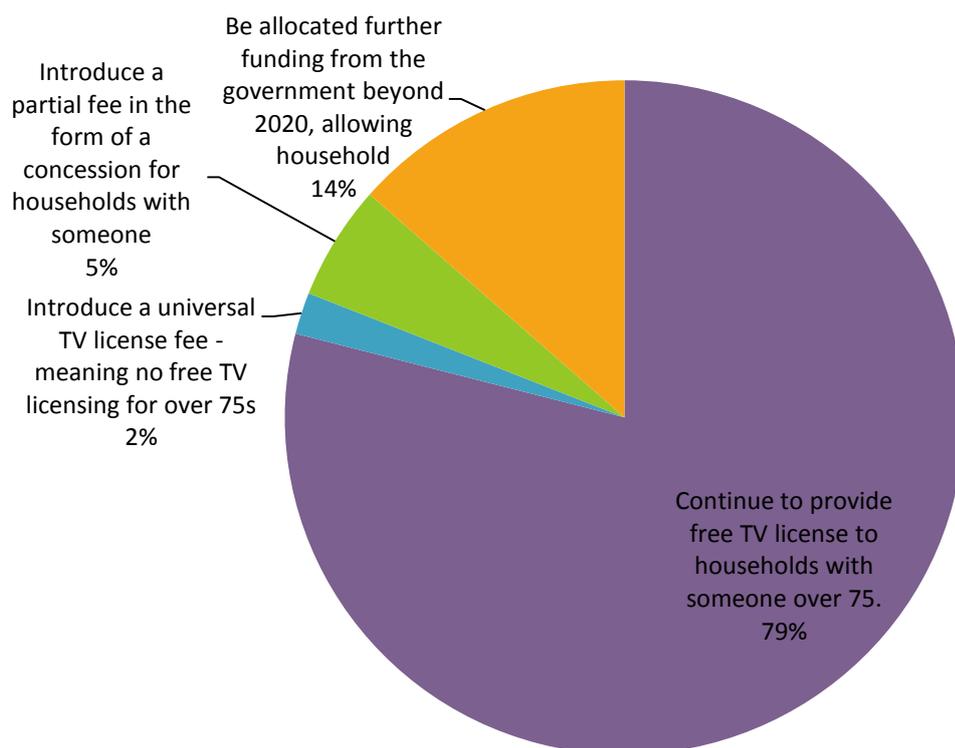
- Free TV licences for the over 75s were introduced by the then Labour Party Chancellor, Gordon Brown in 2001.
- Recently Mr Brown said, “Free TV licences for the over 75s were given in part to recognise the contribution all elderly citizens had made to our community, and also to help ensure dignity for all in retirement. Furthermore, when the TV licence was introduced, it was part of a package of measures brought in to offset the UK’s low level of state pension.”
- Calling it an issue of “national importance”, Mr Brown said: “The BBC should not have to bear the burden of a mistake by the Government.”
- He also warned if the corporation decided to means test eligibility for the licence then it would need access to private Department for Work and Pensions records, throwing up questions of civil liberties.
- Today the UK state pension is still ranked as 37th out of the 37 Organisations for Economic Co-operation and Development countries (OECD).
- Currently some 1.9 million senior citizens across the UK are living in poverty, up from 1.6 million three years ago and the total is expected to top 2 million by 2022.
- None of the alternative options set out in the consultation paper are acceptable to Age Sector Platform as they focus on the finances of the BBC and do not give serious consideration to the social and economic circumstances thousands of older people throughout the UK will be confronted with if the BBC removing free TV licences for over75’s.
- The BBC is an unelected body; it should not be making judgements about the distribution of income between social groups in the UK as that is the role of government.
- Age Sector Platform fully concurs with the National Pensioners Convention spokesperson, Neil Duncan-Jordan who said: “Our view is that the free TV licence should be a government-funded concession. It should never have gone to the broadcaster. It’s not the broadcaster’s role to fund social policy.”

Age Sector Platform's Research Panel

In preparing its submission to the BBC on the Age-Related TV license Policy, Age Sector Platform engaged 200 members of our Research Panel to assist us with a questionnaire. Members of the Research Panel are all pensioners from all over Northern Ireland. Please see results below.

Report for TV licensing fees for older people

Since the BBC announced the launch of its consultation on age-related TV licensing policy, Age Sector Platform has been clear on its view that households with someone over 75 should continue to receive free TV license. To help inform our consultation response, we are asking you to vote on the poll below. We will also take into consideration the many Facebook posts we have received in relation to this issue. When government funding comes to an end in June 2020, do you think the BBC should:



Value	Percent	Count
Continue to provide free TV license to households with someone over 75.	79.0%	158
Introduce a universal TV license fee - meaning no free TV licensing for over 75s and everyone has to pay, regardless of age.	2.0%	4
Introduce a partial fee in the form of a concession for households with someone over 75 – meaning these households would receive some sort of discount on their TV license, so they would have to pay, but not as much as everyone else.	5.5%	11
Be allocated further funding from the government beyond 2020, allowing households with someone over 75 to keep receiving free TV license.	13.5%	27
	Totals	200

Conclusion

The vast majority of older people Age Sector Platform have consulted in preparing this submission to the BBC support the retention of the free TV licence for over 75s.

The reasons older people have cited for the retention of the free TV licence range from a fear of losing their 'best friend' to being left behind the rest of society in a fast moving world of communications or through their ill health and loneliness.

The government must take back responsibility for the cost of free TV licences for the over 75s as it was in our opinion a major lapse in judgement on behalf of the BBC to have accepted this responsibility in 2015.

Commenting on the 2015 deal between Government and the BBC, Lord Birt, the former BBC director general, told the House of Lords that the "deeply shocking deal" amounted to a breach of the BBC's independence, repeating a similar outcome to when the broadcaster agreed to take on the costs of running the World Service five years ago." This has happened again, taking a huge slice out of the BBC's budget. Again it happened with no public discussion of any kind. This government and the last government have essentially set a very dangerous precedent," he said.

It is the view of Age Sector Platform and its membership that the concession of free TV licenses for over 75's should continue beyond June 2020 when the UK government takes back responsibility for the financial administration of the licensing system.