

Hartswood Films – email response

RESPONSE ON CONSULTATION

The question as to whether or not over-75s should or should not pay the BBC licence fee is a social policy matter, that should be set and determined by Parliament and the Government – not the BBC. It is not an issue that the BBC should be in sole control of. However, given the various positions adopted by multiple governments since 2001, the BBC now finds itself in an unenviable situation without a ‘damage free’ solution. The combined challenge of making the BBC ‘match-fit’ for the 21st century, whilst building significantly on it’s youth offer is at direct odds with the continuation of Government policy for younger BBC licence fee payers to subsidise older BBC audiences.

Whilst it has clear challenges, our preference would be to see the introduction of a means tested process, so that those who truly need the benefit receive it. It cannot be right that age alone is the determining factor as to whether or not you pay for a licence – now, more so than ever. This is not the basis on which other benefits are provided. It is a regressive position, particularly given the shift in demographics, socio-economics and relative living standards.

To ease the implementation, we would also support a system that tracked entitlement to other benefits, such as pension credit.

Inevitably, this presents risks that certain people will ‘fall through the cracks’ – those with limited access and understanding of computers and those with declining mental health, for example. Whilst this is a clear risk, it seems defeatist to suggest that there isn’t a method to implement a means test that would best catch and support these people.

Of the options available, this is what gains our support. It significantly mitigates the cost to the BBC, thereby limiting any corresponding reduction in services (particularly those focussed on younger audiences), whilst ensuring those who truly need the benefit receive it - in the most efficient, progressive and fair way possible.