

## **Professor Sylvia Harvey – email response**

“In my view the Government should not have asked and the BBC should not have agreed to take on responsibility for the cost of licence fees for the over 75s. This payment was a universal welfare benefit introduced under a Labour Government and paid for (I believe) by the Department of Work and Pensions. Unfortunately it is relatively common in the UK to find that different political parties disagree on what welfare benefits should be provided by the state using tax payers money. In this case a Conservative Government decided in 2015 to stop paying this welfare benefit. Thus this is in effect a political issue (two political parties disagreeing on what is an appropriate and affordable welfare benefit). The BBC is charged with demonstrating impartiality and should not compromise itself by getting involved in what is, essentially, a political decision. It is in my view most unwise for the BBC to allow itself to be politicised in this way. This is why I have declined to answer any of the questions above.

I am equally disturbed by the clause in the 2017 Digital Economy Act which only comes into force in 2020 (June I believe) as an amendment to the 2003 Communications Act. As I understand it, this is the clause that grants the BBC legal permission to make a decision on whether to pay the over-75s licence fees or not. Here I can only re-state my main and single point - the BBC should not be involved in arriving as what is essentially a political decision. We elect politicians to make these decisions, we fund the BBC to make programmes. Given that 'we are where we are' it is my view that the BBC should under no circumstances take on the cost of paying for the licence fees for the over 75s. Elected politicians must take this decision and it appears that they have already done so.”

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