

Wayne Garvie – email response

Response is written in a personal capacity

I am President of International Production at Sony Pictures Entertainment. I oversee twenty production companies around the world, with seven in the UK, producing shows as diverse as The Crown, Who Want to be a Millionaire and A Very English Scandal. However, I am writing in a personal capacity to respond to the BBC's public consultation on the future of the age related TV licence.

✂My advice to the BBC is to stand firm for what it believes in, reject the burden of the concession and make it clear that it is an issue for the Government. HM Government created this issue is unacceptable for them to now hand it over to the BBC, for the Corporation to take any public anger and the financial hit.

All the examples used in the BBC's consultation document, the work by Frontier Economics and outside parties such as Enders Analysis are all clear: none of the choices will enable the BBC to continue to offer the range of services it presently provides. And most of the choices available would see the inevitable closure of services that are cherished by their audiences, from BBCTwo to Radio 5 Live. Even the least worst scenario would see the organisation requiring cuts equal to 5% of the BBC's budget and the almost certain loss of a service such as CBBC or Radios 1,2,3 and 5 live.

There will be those who say the BBC can simply find such numbers by cutting budgets across the board. We will have the tired arguments that presenters are paid too much, too many taxis are used and BBC Executives' bonuses are too great, as if the combined total of all that would come anything close to £209 million a year, let alone £745million.

However, the BBC should be on the front foot and argue its case forceably. How funding has been cut in real terms by 20% in ten years, through a mixture of the licence fee freeze, digital switchover, funding areas previously provided for by central government, such as the World Service, and being forced to hand over money for ludicrous schemes such as the local television project. It should continually argue how efficient it has become, now a benchmark

for other public services. And finally, it should note that even if it were to cut another fifth from its overheads, it would not come close to making up the difference of the concession.

This would be a brave approach and it will come with some backlash from the press and commentators who do not support the fundamental proposition of the BBC. However, even if the Corporation were to adopt one of the options suggested in the paper, it will still face a barrage of criticism from those voices. If the age threshold is raised, it will be criticised. If it discounts the licence fee, the argument will quickly coalesce around demands for discounts for other groups. If it means tests the concession, fury will be unleashed at the organisation for arrogantly deciding who is or is not poor. In any of this scenarios, the BBC faces a no win situation.

So in many ways it is better to take it on the chin and stand up for what the Corporation really believes in, which is a BBC funded to the appropriate degree to maintain the present level of services. At a time when British soft power is needed more than ever, when the global SVODs threaten to overwhelm our domestic broadcasters, a BBC properly equipped for the digital world is an argument worth fighting for. Sometimes a line has to be drawn.

Furthermore, I would look to take the debate face on and argue that the group in society which is really most challenged in paying the licence fee is not the elderly, but the young. I would take a position that the BBC is not going to accept picking up the concession, but is in fact going to press Government for a change to the 2003 Communications Act to allow free licence fees for any people aged 21 or under who live on their own or with other young people. This may galvanise a generation the BBC needs to deliver for and help them appreciate the services they already receive from the BBC. It may - paradoxically - even find support among the older licence fee payers many of whom will recognise the fairness of the issue.

I understand this may be a very different response to most you may receive and vociferating of this nature may be inappropriate, but sometimes in life, enough is enough and on this issue I believe the BBC may find a rallying call to unite its many supporters.

Your sincerely,

Wayne Garvie