

*Championing
excellence and diversity
in broadcasting*



Founded in 1983 by Jocelyn Hay CBE

**RESPONSE BY THE VOICE OF THE LISTENER & VIEWER
TO THE OFCOM ASSESSMENT OF THE REQUEST FOR A
CHANGE OF LICENCE CONDITIONS RELATING TO THE
PROVISION OF NEWS OUTPUT ON CHANNEL 5**

July 2021

INFORMATION ABOUT THE VLV

1. The Voice of the Listener & Viewer (VLV) is an independent, not for profit membership-based charity, free from political and sectarian affiliations. VLV supports high quality broadcasting which maintains the democratic and cultural traditions of the UK. We support the independence and integrity of the BBC and encourage work which demonstrates commitment to the principles of public service broadcasting (PSB). VLV is a charitable company limited by guarantee (registered in England and Wales No 4407712 - Charity No 1152136).

INTRODUCTION

2. VLV welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on changes requested by Channel 5 regarding its provision of news output.
3. VLV approaches this issue by considering the impact on audiences and their choice of news programmes.
4. VLV considers that the proposal by Channel 5 to broadcast an hour-long bulletin at 1700, rather than two half hour bulletins at 1700 and 1830 will maintain news provision, while hopefully improving it, and that these changes will also improve the range and choice of PSB news programmes available to audiences.
5. VLV agrees with Ofcom that there is 'value and general benefit to viewers in there being a choice of PSB news programmes at various times, as this is likely to appeal to a broader range of audiences. The proposed change is likely to benefit overall PSB news delivery.'¹
6. VLV notes that with a one-hour bulletin at 1700 on Channel 5, there will be no gap in PSB news provision during the early and mid-evening from 1700 until 2000 when Channel 4's main evening news bulletin ends. VLV believes this will be beneficial for audiences.
7. VLV welcomes Channel 5's ambition to provide a 'higher quality news programme' with more in-depth reports creating 'space for more investigative, regional and social affairs news reporting'.² VLV also welcomes Viacom's commitment to increase investment in production to provide the new one-hour bulletin.
8. VLV notes that as part of these proposals Channel 5 has not proposed a reduction in overall total of time for news provision on its service.
9. VLV considers that current scheduling of the 1830 bulletin does not benefit audiences because it clashes with the ITV evening news and BBC regional news, both of which attract audiences of over three million viewers.
10. VLV considers that other PSB news programmes are available during peak time and provide appropriate alternatives to the existing 1830 Channel 5 news programme.

¹ *Request for change of licence conditions relating to the provision of news output on Channel 5 – Our assessment of the request*, Ofcom, 30 June 2021, para 3.15

² Letter from ViacomCBS to Ofcom 4 June 2021

11. VLV acknowledges that the 1830 Channel 5 News bulletin is not additive to PSB news at that time because it is largely an updated repeat the 1700 bulletin.
12. VLV considers that there is the possibility that there could be greater benefit for audiences from the provision of an hour-long bulletin at 1700, providing a greater choice in news programmes in the late afternoon/early evening with a longer, more in-depth programme.
13. VLV acknowledges that there are viewers who value short headline updates during the evening who may not wish to watch a longer-form news programme of thirty or sixty minutes. They would be still be adequately served if Channel 5's proposals are accepted by Ofcom.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

On the basis of the reasoning set out above, below are VLV's responses to the questions set out in the consultation.

a) Would the revised time allocated still constitute an appropriate proportion of time to news programmes on Channel 5?

14. Yes, because no reduction in the overall hours of news output is being requested.

b) Would the revised time allocated still split in an appropriate manner between "peak viewing times" and other times?

15. Yes. While there will be a reduction in the volume of news in peak time on Channel 5, the existing 1830 bulletin is largely a repeat of the 1700 bulletin and therefore is not additive. There are other news bulletins on the BBC, ITV and Channel 4 between 1800 and 2000 and later at 2200 which provide a satisfactory range of content during peak time.

c) Would the revised time allocated still ensure that news programmes are broadcast for viewing at intervals throughout the period for which the channel is provided?

16. VLV believes that the revised time allocated will ensure that enough news programmes are broadcast for viewing at intervals throughout the period for which the channel is provided.