

Musicians' Union

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A response from the Musicians' Union to Ofcom's Second Public Service Broadcasting Review - Phase One: The Digital Opportunity

1. The Musicians' Union (MU) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the discussions surrounding public service broadcasting.
2. The MU has over 32,600 members who work as full or part-time professional musicians. Virtually all of our members will work for the BBC at some time during their careers and the BBC remains the single largest employer of professional musicians in Europe.
3. Our response to this consultation touches on a number of the questions posed in the document, but focuses on the areas that may directly affect the professional activities of our members.

Section Three: How well are the public service broadcasters delivering public purposes?

4. We broadly agree with the points made in Section Three – notably that television continues to have an essential role to play in delivering the purposes of public service broadcasting and that UK-originated output is fundamental to the delivery of public service broadcasting purposes. UK-originated output is an important source of employment for MU members. For examples, coverage of the BBC Proms, Summer Festivals such as Glastonbury and Reading, Radio 1 Road Shows, Music Live and documentaries such as Blue Planet and Walking with Dinosaurs all provide significant opportunities for musicians.

Section Five: Prospects for the future delivery of public service content

5. We accept Ofcom's assessment that in all likelihood, under all scenarios, the audience share of the public service broadcasters is likely to decline in future. We also agree that commercial digital channels are unlikely to fill the gap left by public service broadcasters, and that therefore total investment in content reflecting UK values, cultures and perspectives is likely to decline in real terms. The MU believes that this poses a significant threat to employment opportunities for musicians in the UK.

Section Six: Meeting audience needs in a digital age

6. We agree that plurality amongst public service broadcasters brings benefits to competition for quality, to diversity of voice and to the reach and impact of public service content.

Section Seven: Future models for funding and providing public service content

7. We agree with section 7.4 and support Ofcom's conclusion that changes must be made to the funding of public service broadcasting. Without change, public funding for commercial public service broadcasters will remain focussed on a specific set of linear TV channels whose reach and impact are already declining.
8. However, we would strongly argue against any reduction in the scope of the BBC's activities and against any redeployment of its resources to ensure continued funding for plural provision of public service content. We believe that the BBC is and should remain the cornerstone of public service broadcasting and that its core funding should be protected in order for it to be able to continue to support original programme making.
9. The BBC is the biggest single employer of MU members in the UK and is in the unique position of supporting five full-time orchestras. The BBC orchestras alone employ 382 contract musicians and many hundreds more on a free-lance basis. Virtually all MU members will work for the BBC at one stage of their career. Any reduction in the scope or funding of the BBC would therefore be likely to impact negatively on the employment of musicians. MU members are already reporting a reduction in employment opportunities as a result of reduced BBC production budgets.
10. The BBC is also by far the main primary commissioner of new music in the UK and it should be supported to continue to present new music in exciting and innovative ways. The BBC has always had a strong tradition of investing in talent, and it is vital that it retains the funds to be able to continue to do so.
11. The BBC's commercial services provide significant income for musical creators. We support BBC Worldwide in its current form and encourage its commercial activities with the caveat that at all times composers, performers and other freelance contributors should be correctly remunerated and their rights respected.
12. In addition to the employment opportunities that the BBC provides for musicians, we also believe that it has been instrumental in bringing music to the masses. The BBC plays a crucial role in audience building for music, and it is no exaggeration to say that many first experience the thrill of live performance by listening to the BBC. It should be encouraged to maintain and enhance this role.

13. Although the consultation document states that the BBC's funding will continue to increase in lead up to 2012, as the number of households paying the licence fee continues to increase (section 7.11), we support the view that this increase will be outweighed by new costs, including the cost of providing services to meet all audiences' needs.
14. As already touched upon in point 5, we agree with section 7.14, which suggests that the significant increase in investment by non-PSB channels in original UK content will not be sufficient to fill the potential gaps left by the declining contribution of the commercial public service broadcasters.
15. Since we accept the benefits of plurality in public service broadcasting, and since public service broadcasters other than the BBC do employ significant numbers of musicians, we therefore support recommendation 7.16 - that new funds should be found to replace the current declining implicit subsidy.
16. We would not, however, support any reduction in BBC money. We do not agree with any proposals for 'top slicing' so that other PSBs can be given access to licence fee income, and we would not support the idea that money currently being used for digitisation by the BBC could in future be used to fund other PSBs. After digitisation, this money should go towards benefiting the high quality programming that the BBC is known for. This would be an ideal opportunity to remedy some of the funding issues that the BBC has had as a result of the last below inflation licence fee settlement.
17. Evidently, this would mean that new methods of funding other PSBs would have to be found. Of the mechanisms proposed for funding public service content in figure 47, the Musicians' Union would support the regulatory assets option. We would also urge Ofcom to conduct further research into the option of introducing industry levies. We believe that non-public service broadcasters could be required to contribute to the funding of public service broadcasting, although we accept that it may be appropriate for commercial BBC enterprises such as BBC Worldwide to contribute under such a scheme.

Conclusion

18. For the reasons set out above, the only model for future public service broadcasting (set out in section 7.37) that the Musicians' Union would fully endorse is Model 1 – Evolution. Our primary concern, however, remains the protection of core BBC funding.