

Digital Britain: Attitudes to supporting non-BBC regional news from the TV licence fee

Interim Summary Report

Prepared for: DCMS

September 2009

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1 Method

This document contains a topline summary of results from the 'Public Opinion on funding Sustainable Regional News' research study commissioned by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. The research aimed to assess public opinion on the government's proposal of 'contained contestability' which aims to use a small portion of the TV licence fee to encourage news companies into the regional and local news market from 2013.

In brief, the research objectives were to:

- evaluate the degree of importance that the UK population attaches to plural provision of news in the nations, as well as locally and regionally;
- assess the extent to which TV licence holders support or oppose the principle of using the TV licence fee to fund public service content beyond the BBC, primarily for regional news bulletins;

The research was based on a quantitative survey conducted during the period 27th August to 3rd September 2009. Data were collected via TNS-BMRB's face-to-face Omnibus survey and were based on a nationally representative sample of 2024 adults aged 18+ in the United Kingdom. The Omnibus survey covered 1960 adults in GB and an additional *ad hoc* sample of 64 interviews was carried out in Northern Ireland. The final survey data were weighted to ensure that demographic profiles matched those for all adults in the UK aged 18+.

The survey questionnaire was just under 10 minutes in length. This was developed in consultation with DCMS, and then tested through a cognitive pilot of 20 interviews conducted with respondents recruited to ensure a good spread across the key demographics (gender, age, social class). The cognitive pilot enabled TNS-BMRB to refine the question wording, to ensure the questions were fully comprehensible to all members of the public, and that the questions would deliver an accurate and unbiased measure of public opinion.

These findings are based on weighted topline data. A detailed report will be available later this month.

2 Survey Questions & Results

Most UK households are required to pay a television licence fee of £142.50 a year. Choosing from this list which services do you think the money from the licence fee pays for?	%
BBC One & Two	77
BBC Digital Channels	59
BBC Radio	58
BBC Online/bbc.co.uk	50
Spend on digital switchover	22
Help for older and less well off people to meet the cost of digital switchover	14
Channel 4	9
ITV1	8
General government spending (eg on health or education)	8
Channel Five	6
Other [digital] TV Channels	5
S4C	4
Other	1
Don't know	6
Base:	2024

I'M NOW GOING TO READ OUT SOME INFORMATION ABOUT THE TV LICENCE FEE. THIS IS ALSO SHOWN ON THIS CARD FOR REFERENCE

The television licence fee is primarily used to fund BBC content and services. However at present, a small part (about 4% or roughly £5 per year) of each licence fee is not used for BBC services but is used to help make the switchover to Digital TV easier for groups like the elderly and disabled.

Before this interview, were you aware that licence fee money has been used both to fund the BBC and help with digital switchover?	%
Yes	29
No	71
Base:	2024

INTERVIEWER READ OUT & RESPONDENT SHOWN CARD WITH THIS INFORMATION:

In 2013, once the switchover to Digital TV has been completed, the amount people will pay for their TV licence will be reviewed. At that point, one possibility is to keep the small part of the licence fee money previously used for digital switchover to ensure certain types of programmes are available on other channels in addition to the BBC. These programmes would include quality news, but possibly also UK-made documentaries, children's programmes and quality dramas. The majority of the licence fee would continue to be used by the BBC.

After 2013, in your personal opinion should a small part of the licence fee be used to support certain types of programmes on other (that is non-BBC) channels, OR do you think the licence fee should be set for the BBC's use only?	%
A small part of the licence fee should be used to support certain types of programmes on other channels, with most of the fee still going to the BBC	48
The licence fee should be used only on BBC content and services	35
I don't care either way	10
I do care, but I don't know	6
Base:	2024

One of the main types of programmes the licence fee pays for is news on BBC TV, radio, and online. I want now to look at where you get your news from. Which of these do you normally use for national news - that is news affecting the whole of the UK? CHOOSE ALL THAT YOU NORMALLY USE	%
TV – BBC	63

Radio	31
TV – ITV/STV/UTV/GMTV	30
Newspapers/magazines	28
Internet	22
TV – Sky News	17
TV – Channel 4	9
TV - Five	4
TV – Teletext/red button	4
Other TV news	3
TV – S4C	1
Other	1
None of these	2
Don't know	*
Base:	2024

Thinking about all the ways you get the news, how often do you watch/listen to/look at national news - that is news affecting the whole of the UK?	%
Every day or nearly every day (at least 5 times a week)	75
3-4 times a week	11
Once or twice a week	7
Occasionally or if it happens to be on/available	4
Never	2
It varies	1
Don't know	*
Base:	2024

Thinking now about news just for your region and your local area, which of these do you normally use for this kind of regional or local news? CHOOSE ALL THAT YOU NORMALLY USE	%
TV – BBC	46
TV – ITV/STV/UTV/GMTV	30
Newspapers/magazines	26
Radio	17
TV – local station	11
Internet	10
TV – Teletext/red button	2
TV – S4C	1
Other	1
None of these	4
Don't know	*
Base:	2024

Thinking about all the ways you get this type of news, how often do you watch/listen to/look at regional or local news?	%
Every day or nearly every day (at least 5 times a week)	60
3-4 times a week	15
Once or twice a week	13
Occasionally or if it happens to be on/available	6
Never	5
It varies	1
Don't know	*
Base:	2024

Still thinking about news specific to your region and your local area, how important or otherwise do you feel it is to have a choice of different TV channels which provide this service?	%
(IMPORTANT)	(73)
Very important	37
Fairly important	35

(NOT IMPORTANT)	(26)
Not very important	21
Not at all important	6
Don't know	1
Base:	2024

And still thinking about news specific to your region and your local area, how important or otherwise do you feel it is to have a choice of different sources of news - TV, online, newspapers etc - which provide this service?	%
(IMPORTANT)	(84)
Very important	48
Fairly important	36
(NOT IMPORTANT)	(15)
Not very important	11
Not at all important	4
Don't know	1
Base:	2024

In your personal opinion, would it be enough to have regional news on the BBC only, or should regional news be available on other channels in addition to the BBC?	%
It would be enough to have regional news on the BBC only	17
Regional news should be available on other channels in addition to the BBC	71
I don't care either way	10
I do care, but I don't know	2
Base:	2024

I'M NOW GOING TO READ OUT SOME MORE INFORMATION WHICH IS ALSO SHOWN ON THIS CARD FOR REFERENCE

ITV announced that in the near future they may no longer be able to afford to provide regional or local news as they are getting less and less money from advertising. The same is true of radio and newspapers that are supported by advertising.

As a result, there is a real possibility, for example, that in the near future only the BBC (and S4C in Wales) will provide quality regional or local news on the TV.

Were you aware of this issue before today?	%
Yes	25
No	75
Base:	2024

AND SOME MORE INFORMATION WHICH IS ALSO SHOWN ON THIS CARD...

As you heard earlier, from 2013 when the licence fee is reviewed, there is a proposal to address this issue.

This is to take the small part of the licence fee that had previously been spent on the switchover to digital channels, i.e. about £5 per year or 4% of the licence fee, and use it instead to provide financial support for regional and local news on another channel and also possibly on the internet, on radio or in local newspapers.

Most of the licence fee would still go to the BBC.

Bearing all of this in mind, in your personal opinion, from 2013 should a small part of the licence fee be used to support regional or local news on another channel, OR do you think the licence fee should be used only for the BBC?	%
The licence fee should be used only for the BBC	24
A small part of the licence fee should be used to support regional news on another channel with most of the money still going to the BBC	65
I don't care either way	8
I do care, but I don't know	4
Base:	2024

List responses ranked excluding none of these and don't know. Where a * appears the number of responses were less than 1% but more than zero.