



NUJ BBC News Channel/BBC World briefing

The NUJ is gravely concerned that the level of cuts forced on the BBC and certain decisions by its management are leading to a hollowing out of news coverage. The decision to close the BBC News Channel and BBC World News and create a new rolling news service in April 2023, with 70 fewer journalists, is a major mistake. It has been mooted before, but the merger proposal was dropped because it would not work.

On the proposed channel, most daily UK news would come from programmes audiences can already access elsewhere: Nicky Campbell's phone-in on 5Live, BBC1 bulletins and Newsnight. Managers have told staff that they do not believe there is anything in the plans to trouble Ofcom, but the NUJ has called on the regulator to step in and hold an inquiry into the BBC's proposals. This is a major change to the service. **The NUJ urges MPs to put pressure on Ofcom to hold an inquiry and public consultation on the plans.**

The BBC remains the most trusted source of news in this country and the most trusted international news broadcaster. It is a crucial part of the UK's soft power: it's the UK's best-known cultural export, with 60 per cent awareness across the world – higher than other UK similar exports such as British sports, universities and technology.

Both TV channels have crucial and distinctive roles which will be diminished in a combined service.

The News Channel is available only in the UK and provides a voice for British MPs, mayors and politicians – and a chance for them to not only to be held to account, but also to raise issues important to their constituents. It can go into greater depth on reports by charities and other civil society organisations.

BBC World News is funded by subscription and advertising revenues, not by the UK television licence, and is not broadcast in the UK, though reports and programming are also used by the BBC News channel. It has a weekly audience of about 364 million people around the globe.

Under the proposals, for overseas viewers it will still carry adverts. Licence fee money must not be spent on a commercial project, which the proposed new channel will primarily be. Managers have not been willing to spell out exactly how they can blend licence fee funding with commercial income. Competitor broadcasters would no doubt have questions about this.

The BBC News Channel is a 24-hour impartial and independent service offering breaking news, analysis and insight. It provides fast and comprehensive coverage of local, UK and international events as they unfold. Its news packages and interviews are used throughout the BBC's network.

The BBC Online "Live Page" can sometimes only function thanks to the material the BBC News Channel produces. Such was the case during the Conservative leadership debates. The channel combines coverage of live events with real-time analysis and explanations to help audiences keep up to date and make sense of significant developments, including key public health messages. Ros Atkins's explainers of news stories, many of which originated on the BBC News Channel, have become a viral phenomenon as they condense complicated issues into accessible stories. His approach has recently won him the title of the BBC's first analysis editor.

The BBC News Channel helps audiences understand the news in the way that is most relevant to them, as well as presenting specialised programmes reflecting the international news agenda. It can pick up live stories as and when they break around the world – as many as 22m people tuned in when war broke out in the Ukraine. It has a special role in covering stories across the devolved nations and its audience is more diverse, across all categories, than BBC One or the other BBC channels.

As Tim Davie, BBC director general, said in the corporation's latest annual report: "Our job is not to simply compete with the big global streamers on volume of content but to maximise our unique value to audiences by focusing on distinctive British storytelling of outstanding quality."

The BBC is meant to be less London-focused these days. The BBC News Channel reflects the Nations and Regions of the UK more than any other national platform.

It is unclear how UK audiences will be guaranteed access to relevant news stories when competing against breaking world events.

Creating a new channel will inevitably diminish the overall breath and diversity of content, and for UK licence-fee payers this could have a direct effect on democracy. The current BBC News channel has provided viewers with up-to-date coverage of UK elections, party conferences, by-elections and, more recently, the contest for the next Prime Minister. Such reportage may be lost in a combined channel where global events are competing for airtime.

Regional BBC programming, including updates on floods, extreme weather events and transport issues may also struggle to receive coverage, despite being of huge significance to UK viewers. Meanwhile, viewers of a new combined service in Bangladesh will not be impressed by the banks of the Ouse breaking.

The BBC's budget is 30 per cent lower than a decade ago in real terms. Tim Davie said the corporation had saved more than £1bn over the past five years but, because of the UK government's decision to freeze the licence fee and rising inflation, he anticipated annual savings of £285m would be needed by 2027/28. This is likely to be much more as the costs in the broadcasting industry have spiralled even beyond the frightening rates we are now experiencing.

The government must urgently provide adequate funding to support the BBC in its reporting and news coverage of events worldwide. The NUJ believes that, while operated by the BBC, the funding for the World Service should once again be delivered by the government rather than from the licence fee.

The BBC must be made to think again and reverse its decision to close these vital and distinct channels.

The NUJ is asking politicians to:

- Ask parliamentary questions and raise concerns with the BBC about the impact of changes on local news in your constituency and the impact on domestic UK political coverage caused by the closure of the BBC News channel.
- Raise with the Westminster government and BBC the threat the closure will have on coverage of the devolved governments.
- Call on Ofcom to investigate the plans and hold a public consultation.
- Urge government to explore alternative funding routes that sustains the BBC as a world-respected public service broadcaster and enshrines the key principle of universality in any changed funding mechanism.