



## **NUJ briefing – BBC Charter Renewal**

January 2026

### **Introduction**

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) believes that Charter Renewal is an opportunity to secure the funding and reforms that will guarantee the BBC’s future at the centre of UK cultural life.

At a time of polarisation, social media disinformation, AI-supercharged fake news, and corporate consolidation of media ownership, the BBC’s journalism is vital in maintaining healthy public discourse and democracy. Despite concerted political attacks, the BBC remains the most trusted source of news in the UK according to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report.

The NUJ’s [News Recovery Plan](#) sets out various interventions – from sustainable funding to worker representation and protection from political interference – that represent journalists’ vision for their workplace and an impartial, universally available and funded BBC.

The government should meaningfully engage trade unions and NUJ members at the BBC throughout the Charter Renewal process. There should also be greater public consultation to understand what licence fee payers value and want from our public service broadcaster. Consultations on Charter Renewal or the BBC’s future funding - whether carried out by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, Ofcom or the BBC - should be widely promoted to the public via the BBC’s on air and online channels.

### **Secure funding**

#### Prioritising quality news provision

The resignations of director general Tim Davie and head of news Deborah Turness have caused uncertainty and concern among many NUJ members at the BBC. The misediting by Panorama of a speech made by President Trump in 2021 has been exploited by politicians at home and abroad who seek to undermine the principle of public service broadcasting.

Mistakes are more likely where journalists are overburdened and journalism is under-resourced. In 2024 Davie stated that 14 years of successive cuts had resulted in a 30% real terms reduction in the BBC’s budget. This has undermined and weakened the BBC’s radio, television and digital output, as well as its core news provision – locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. Freezes and reductions to the licence fee, decided in closed-door negotiations with ministers

since 2010, have also resulted in a real term pay cut for staff, the loss of many experienced journalists and a decline in the quality of training.

The BBC's funding model must protect the principle of universality and its funding settlement must be sufficient to deliver quality public service broadcasting throughout the nations and regions. Content and programming should not be moved to the commercially-run BBC Studios, which operates as a competitor within the wider broadcasting landscape rather than an enabler of the creative sector. The NUJ categorically rejects any form of commercialisation within the public service broadcaster - including advertising that undermines the BBC's integrity and impartiality or subscriptions that lead to a two-tier service and undermine universality.

The NUJ has supported the license fee model and opposed decriminalisation of nonpayment, which remains an effective deterrent against evasion. There must be meaningful, sustained increases to the licence fee that ends salami slicing cuts, protects against political interference, and prioritises quality local, regional, national and international news provision.

The BBC Charter is the only one in the UK that requires regular renewal, which potentially exposes the BBC to a fight for its survival every ten years depending on the political intentions of the government of the day.

#### Restoring local radio

Local radio remains a popular way of accessing news, particularly for groups who are more likely to be digitally excluded, such as older people and disabled people.

In 2023 BBC bosses slashed local radio with shows cut across all 39 stations and well-loved presenters, journalists and producers made redundant. Most BBC Local Radio stations now share programmes after 2pm on weekdays and weekends, meaning that only programmes from 6am to 2pm on weekdays remain genuinely local.

The BBC should reverse these damaging cuts and increase investment in both digital and linear news, including local radio with live news bulletins that are relevant to the communities they serve.

The government can also reverse decisions that have diverted licence fee income away from the BBC's core work, for example by directly funding free licences for anyone eligible over 75. The BBC's annual report states that in 2025 the Corporation funded 1,020,000 licences, primarily for eligible over 75s.

The NUJ supports the Local Democracy Reporter scheme but argues it should be reshaped so that no public money goes to companies cutting frontline journalistic roles, taking executive bonuses or blocking trade unions. NUJ members called for reform following concerns that some employers were taking advantage of the programme, demanding unacceptable story count levels and offering low pay.

#### Full funding for the World Service

The government must also commit long-term funding to the BBC World Service. The World Service is one of the UK's greatest global assets, operating across 43 languages and reaching 320 million people worldwide every week. It is the world's largest external broadcaster in terms of reception area, language selection and audience.

It is also our most effective defence against the concentration of global media power in the hands of a few private individuals. In a world where journalists and independent media are threatened, targeted and attacked, the BBC World Service provides audiences with independent, impartial, trusted news and information.

However, several rounds of cuts at the World Service have seen the BBC reduce its provision in many countries and replaced by other state-funded media outlets, including from China, Russia and Saudi Arabia. The BBC has seemingly used these cuts as an opportunity to offshore journalistic jobs in services like BBC Arabic and BBC Africa from the UK to countries with restricted press freedom, weaker labour laws and anti-union legislation.

In 2023 BBC Persian Radio was shut down after 82 years of broadcasting due to funding cuts. The essential work of language services like BBC Persian was exemplified by journalists' coverage of recent national protests in Iran. Despite widespread internet blackouts and repressive measures, millions of people in Iran have accessed BBC Persian coverage. Journalists at the broadcaster pay a huge personal and professional cost for doing their jobs with escalating threats and intimidation against them and their families by the Iranian regime. This is not the time for the BBC to retreat from vital reporting that offers trusted, objective news to audiences.

The World Service receives most of its funding from the BBC licence fee as well as funding from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. Responding to reports of further cuts from the FCDO budget, the NUJ BBC World Service branch stated that this "would be music to the ears of dictators and the enemies of the free press around the world."

The government should recognise the value of the BBC's global reach by re-establishing full funding for the World Service. It is in the national interest to end the annual cycle of uncertainty and commit to a sufficient, durable funding settlement.

## **Proper representation**

### Diverse programming

Providing sustainable funding for quality journalism will strengthen public trust and better serve under-represented communities.

NUJ members acknowledge that the BBC's universal funding is a privilege and comes with a responsibility to serve all audiences. While the BBC reaches 95% of the UK adult population each month, nations and regions have been underserved and underrepresented for years.

The union is concerned that Local Radio cuts have particularly affected ethnic minority communities and seeks assurances from the BBC on its plans for diverse programming.

In addition to restoring local radio services, the BBC should pilot innovative initiatives to improve news provision in news 'deserts' where there is no other source of local news.

#### Improving access

The BBC should improve on- and off-screen diversity initiatives, offering training programmes and apprenticeships to people from diverse, working-class backgrounds who are traditionally denied entry to journalism.

The BBC could also participate in a UK-wide media literacy initiative, equipping children and adults with the necessary skills to navigate an era of disinformation and deep fakes. This would be complemented by investment in news resources – like BBC Verify – that help the public assess and interrogate the veracity of sources and information. Again, the BBC must receive the requisite funding to fulfil its core responsibility to educate.

#### Worker representation

NUJ members at the BBC have demanded governance reform. There should be proper worker representation on the BBC board with at least 25% of board seats filled by employees from non-management roles to champion public interest journalism. To change the culture of an institution, workers must have a say on its most important oversight and decision-making body.

### **Real independence**

#### Board reform

In addition to worker representation, the BBC board and its chair should be chosen by an arms-length body to protect the BBC from political interference and ensure greater independence. The NUJ opposes any political appointees to the BBC board.

#### Improved whistleblowing procedures

NUJ members at the BBC have raised concerns about the accuracy of the memo containing one-sided accusations of bias by former editorial adviser Michael Prescott that was leaked in the week before Davie and Turness' resignations. Members also noted that board member Sir Robbie Gibb confirmed to the Culture Media and Sport Committee hearing that he has become involved in editorial matters.

NUJ members have called for whistle-blowing procedures for staff to be established so serious breaches of editorial standards can be addressed at the earliest opportunity. There should also be greater safeguards and support for BBC journalists, some of whom regularly experience harassment and abuse – which no one should have to tolerate at work.

#### Upholding impartiality and fearless reporting

President Trump's threat to sue the BBC for \$5 billion – which is tantamount to a mega SLAPP and represents an attack on UK democracy - is wholly disproportionate and reflects the Trump administration's track record of attempting to defund, cow and censor domestic and foreign media.

The BBC must back its staff and resist politically motivated attacks that do a disservice to the thousands of journalists striving to meet high editorial standards while conducting themselves professionally under immense scrutiny.

AI-generated news is another significant threat to public trust in journalism. The BBC must be an industry-leading employer in the ethical use of AI within its journalism, adopting a cautious, transparent approach by only deploying new technology with proper safeguards and after consultation with the union representatives.

There must also be improved pay, conditions and training to retain staff, maintain impartiality, and uphold journalists' right to report freely - without fear or interference.

## **Summary**

The government has an opportunity to demonstrate that it has the courage, vision, ambition and determination needed to protect one of the UK's most treasured national assets, putting the BBC on secure and sustainable footing for generations to come.

We urge parliamentarians to engage with the Charter Review process and champion practical interventions in the NUJ's News Recovery Plan by advocating for:

### **1. Secure funding:**

- Sustained increases to the licence fee to deliver quality public service broadcasting and local, regional, national and international news provision.
- Central government funding for free licences for eligible over 75s, reversal of Local Radio cuts and increased investment in both digital and linear news, including genuinely live and local radio news bulletins.
- Sustainable, clearly demarcated and protected government funding for the BBC World Service.

### **2. Proper representation:**

- Programming and news provision that better reflects the diverse communities the BBC serves.
- Training and apprenticeship opportunities to address social barriers and improve access to journalism.
- Worker representation on the BBC board with 25% of board seats filled by non-management BBC journalists.

### **3. Real independence:**

- BBC chair and board appointed by an arms-length body.
- Whistle-blowing procedures for staff established to address serious breaches of editorial standards at the earliest opportunity.
- Improved pay, conditions and training for staff to uphold editorial standards and protect journalists' right to report freely - without fear or interference.