NUJ briefing – BBC cuts & Charter Renewal

Introduction

November 2026

Following decades of underfunding and real-terms reductions to the licence fee, the BBC has announced widespread cuts to jobs and programming that will severely undermine its core public service mission.

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) has expressed dismay at the timing of these cuts given the Charter Renewal process is underway. The union believes that Charter Renewal is an opportunity to secure funding and reforms that will guarantee a brighter future.

The BBC isn't the only public service broadcaster (PSB) facing unprecedented and existential threats. STV has cut newsrooms and local programming; Channel 4 announced plans to cut a quarter of its staff; and Comcast announced plans to take over ITV. At a time of polarisation, social media disinformation, AI-supercharged fake news, and corporate consolidation of media ownership, the public service 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's '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 independent, 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 government, Ofcom or the BBC - should be widely promoted to the public.

We urge parliamentarians to:

- Raise urgent parliamentary questions about BBC cuts, calling for government intervention including by taking back full funding of the World Service and free licences for eligible over-75s.
- Sign EDM 185: 'Job cuts planned at the BBC'.
- Share joint union Megaphone petition, 'Back Workers. Back the BBC', with constituents to garner public support for BBC.
- Engage with the Charter Review process and amplify in parliament, the NUJ's calls for secure funding, proper representation and real independence (see further details at the end of the document)

Chapter 1: Cuts, cuts, cuts

Timeline of cuts

In April 2026, the BBC announced alarming proposals to cut 2,000 jobs - one in ten - as part of proposals to cut 10% of its total costs by the end of 2028-29.

Since then, management have been implementing cuts in dribs and drabs, creating uncertainty for staff, and making it harder to get an overall picture of where the axe will fall and coordinate industrial action.

In June Matt Brittin, the BBC's new director general, confirmed that there would be a reduction of 550 roles across the BBC's news, nations, and content teams in just the first wave of cuts with BBC Content losing 100 roles; BBC News losing around 200 roles; and BBC Nations losing around 250 roles - including around 90 roles in BBC Local.

In September the BBC announced further proposals - particularly affecting BBC Local, BBC Sport, and BBC Wales - putting hundreds of members at risk of redundancy. Cuts to BBC Local include radio services that continue to attract millions of listeners around the country each week, despite Local Radio already being slashed in 2023. Cuts to BBC Local include the loss of 20 roles at BBC Cymru, affecting Senedd reporting, Welsh-language output and the award-winning investigative journalism of *Newyddion S4C*. The BBC also withdrew its promise of jobs for apprentices working in BBC News - a programme designed to help increase representation and entry routes into journalism, particularly for young people from diverse working-class backgrounds. The NUJ warned that the BBC risks becoming trapped in an avoidable "doom-spiral" - with mass cuts harming the quality of services, making it harder to justify public spending, which in turn leads to further cuts.

Most recently, on 20 October, the BBC announced plans to close its BBC Three and BBC Scotland television channels in the Spring, making them online-only with some programmes available on iPlayer. Around four million UK households rely on terrestrial TV, including many older adults and those in rural areas with subpar broadband infrastructure. The NUJ has highlighted that the BBC's increasing adoption of digital-only services will increase the digital divide that exists, undermining the BBC's foundational commitment to universality. Radio 4 Extra is also set to be closed and there are also reports that BBC Northern Ireland will cut its Irish language staff and outsource some of its production.

Impact on freelances and programming

The cuts are also set to result in significantly fewer opportunities for freelances. For example, a cohort of the BBC's foreign stringers (correspondents) had their employment terminated from 1 August, despite many giving over 20 years of service. This effectively ended regular BBC News coverage of 13 European countries: the entire Balkans, Czechia, Poland, Portugal, and Switzerland - including the UN. This will only result in minimal savings while damaging the BBC's global reputation. The NUJ has urged the BBC to reconsider its decision.

Alongside job cuts, the BBC is axing original, distinctive programming. BBC One has lost the Sunday edition of *BBC Breakfast*. The World Service has lost *The World Tonight* and *The Conversation*. Radio 4 alone is set to lose *Midnight News*, *MoneyBox Live*, *Anti-Social, You and Yours*, *Thinking Aloud*, *Free Thinking*, *The Artificial Human*, *Open Country*, and *Crossing Continents*. This is despite strong listening figures and the essential public service role of the programming: for example, *You and Yours* provides specialist consumer rights information and has comparable figures to *Desert Island Discs*. Meanwhile the removal of BBC Scotland's *News at Seven* programme is particularly concerning - especially given Ofcom's decision to allow STV to axe the Northern edition of its *News at 6* programme earlier this year despite the NUJ's campaign securing strong public and political support. The NUJ supports EDM 1000 in underlining the "alarming direction of travel" for Scottish broadcasting.

Impact on workers

Further cuts are expected in the coming months and it appears nothing is off the table. There is a lack of clarity on the overall picture and salami-slicing is still taking place despite previous assurances.

The piecemeal nature of these cuts is creating constant anxiety for our members. Previous rounds of cuts have resulted in loss of talented and experienced staff and unmanageable workloads. This was illustrated by NUJ members at *BBC Newshour* and *The World Tonight* taking industrial action on 18 May - Matt Brittin's first day in the job - over changes to rotas that would have resulted in 26 additional office days per year with no extra pay. The dispute was resolved four days later but the BBC should see this as a warning sign that workers will not accept worse conditions and excessive workloads.

The NUJ is organising to resist the cuts. The union has recruited over 250 members at the BBC in recent months and is now balloting members for industrial action over both compulsory redundancies and pay.

Chapter 2: Charter Renewal

Secure funding

Government intervention to stop cuts

Ultimately these cuts are the result of 15 years of underfunding and real-terms cuts to the licence fee. This presents an existential threat. If management and government continue down this path, we could lose the BBC.

Since 2010 the BBC's funding has been cut in real-terms by around 30% following reductions, freezes or below-inflation rises in the licence fee decided in closed-door negotiations with ministers. This has weakened the BBC's radio, television and digital output and has an impact on audiences and quality as mistakes are more likely where journalists are overburdened and journalism is under-resourced. At the same time the BBC has been required to bear additional costs, including directly funding the BBC World Service and additional 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.

Charter Renewal presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to secure sustainable, universal funding for the BBC. However, the BBC's relentless campaign of cuts demonstrates that the positive reforms that could result from Charter Renewal will not come soon enough.

There is a financial, social and political imperative for the government to urgently intervene. The BBC generates £6.7 billion for the economy each year. It also employs around 79,000 people, creates opportunities for thousands of freelances, and supports the wider creative industries - which, according to government figures, contributed £146 billion to the economy in 2024.

In the short-term, the government alleviate financial pressure on the BBC by providing direct funding for free licences for eligible over 75s and re-establishing full funding for the World Service - measures also supported by the BBC. Over 180 members have written to their MP and the union has written to the Prime Minister and Chancellor to call for urgent relief in the Autumn budget.

Protecting universality and prioritising public service journalism

In the longer-term, NUJ members have been united in calling for the BBC's funding model to protect the principle of universality and for the government to agree a funding settlement that prioritises jobs and the BBC's ability to deliver a quality public service - including quality programming and local, regional, national, and international news.

The NUJ has supported sustained, meaningful increases to the licence fee - which offers remarkable value for money compared to other household utility costs - as well as better enforcement to address the disparity between those who use the BBC (94%) and those who pay for it (80%). The union is also open to engagement on alternative funding mechanisms, for example progressive forms of taxation, so long as this boosts the BBC's budget and preserves its universality. A significant number of members have expressed support for a household levy and the union plans to conduct further research and consultation with members.

The NUJ categorically rejects any form of commercialisation. This includes advertising that undermines the BBC's integrity and impartiality or subscriptions that lead to a two-tier service and undermine universality. In an internal NUJ survey on Charter Renewal completed by hundreds of members at the BBC, almost all respondents (99%) agreed that the BBC should always be universally accessible and protected from commercial and political influence. Any partnerships with third party platforms must not compromise the universal accessibility, impartiality or public service remit of the BBC's journalism. Similarly, 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.

Any decisions over the BBC's funding model must be subject to both public consultation and parliamentary scrutiny; for too long the BBC's funding has been decided in closed-door meetings with ministers. The BBC Charter is the only one in the UK that requires regular renewal, potentially exposing the BBC to a fight for its survival every ten years depending on the political intentions of the government of the day. The Culture Secretary has said she is "minded" to support a permanent charter – a move the NUJ would support. The BBC can only achieve its core mission and fulfil its public purposes with enhanced, sustainable funding.

Bolstering news locally and globally

Local news plays a fundamental role in a democracy by keeping communities informed, countering the spread of misinformation, and holding local authorities to account. People have a right to know what is happening in their constituency and a lack of local news threatens any devolution agenda. Returning power to communities and ensuring places across the UK are properly represented requires local journalists who can scrutinise decision-makers and ensure people's voices are heard.

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, meaning less genuinely local coverage. 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 up-to-date and relevant to the communities they serve.

The NUJ also supports the expansion of the Local Democracy Reporter (LDR) scheme and notes the mention in the green paper of a potential mandate for the BBC to "develop a public service partnerships strategy, including a requirement that it must explore partnerships with high-quality local media outlets." The NUJ has argued that the LDR scheme should also be reformed so that no public money goes to companies cutting frontline journalistic roles, taking executive bonuses or blocking trade unions. This followed concerns raised by NUJ members that some employers were taking advantage of the scheme, demanding unacceptable story counts and offering low pay. Any expansion of the scheme should not be based on top slicing the licence fee from elsewhere. Parliamentarians can find more information in the NUJ's separate LDR briefing.

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 313 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, accurate, 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 closed after 82 years of broadcasting due to funding cuts. The essential work of language services like BBC Persian was exemplified by journalists' coverage of the war and national protests in Iran earlier this year. Despite US-Israeli airstrikes, 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 (see the NUJ's BBC Persian briefing for further information). 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 (FCDO). Responding to uncertainty over the World Service's future, 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 94% of the UK adult population each month, nations and regions have been underserved and underrepresented for years.

The BBC's ability to produce locally-relevant, community-centred reporting is central to serving diverse audiences. 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. As well as condemning the failure to guarantee jobs for apprentices, the union is also concerned that Black staff are leaving in disproportionate numbers.

This should be accompanied by addressing disparities in pay. There have been high profile examples of women journalists being paid less than their male counterparts, including presenters winning landmark equal pay cases in recent years. Yet in 2025 the BBC's mean gender pay gap increased to 5.7% while the mean ethnicity pay gap increased to 3.5%. The BBC has a duty to ensure that pay structures are clear and transparent, that workers are treated equally, and that their work is valued fairly.

The BBC should also play a central role in enabling people to recognise and access accurate information. Alongside other public broadcasters and with government support, the BBC should lead a UK-wide media literacy initiative to equip 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. This week the government has announced plans to create a National Centre for Information Defence. The aim of helping communities identify and combat disinformation is laudable - but is utterly undermined if cuts to the national broadcaster's local, regional and national news are allowed to go ahead.

Worker representation

To improve representation, accountability and trust, workers must have a say on the BBC's most important oversight and decision-making body. NUJ members have demanded worker representation on the BBC board. In the NUJ's Charter Renewal survey, 90% of respondents agreed that at least a quarter of board seats should be filled by employees from non-management roles to champion public interest journalism without political interference. These workers would have the same powers as other non-executive board members.

Having secured a private commitment on board reform during the union's meeting with the Culture Secretary in April, in July Nandy said that the UK government is "almost certainly" going to pursue worker representation, noting the "compelling case" the union had made.

The NUJ has since met DCMS to discuss how worker representation could work in practice. The NUJ has not been prescriptive in supporting a particular model of worker representation but notes that the BBC could adapt and adopt a similar model to that of its pension trustees where

candidates are nominated and elected by their colleagues. Any process for electing workers to the board must be transparent, accessible and accountable.

The NUJ notes that in response to calls for worker representation, the BBC has instead suggested creating a staff network similar to that of the ITV ambassadors' network. This is a fundamentally different proposal. Staff networks are ineffective, as NUJ reps at ITV have reported. At best they create a further forum for dialogue (rather than decision-making); at worst they are not independent of management and can undermine industrial relations.

The NUJ urges the government to follow through on its ambitious pledges for fundamental board reform. Such a move would provide a huge boost to demoralised staff and signal the government's commitment to positively resetting industrial relations in the new era of enhanced trade union and workers' rights under the Employment Rights Act. As one of the most significant and recognised national institutions, the BBC should lead the way in adopting a progressive governance model that gives workers' a proper say in how their workplace is run.

Real independence

Board reform

Governance reform is fundamental to strengthening the BBC's independence. The NUJ strongly opposes any political appointees to the BBC board - a call supported by 91% of respondents in the union's Charter Renewal survey and by the BBC itself in its green paper response. In addition to worker representation, the BBC board and its chair should be chosen by an arms-length body to protect the corporation from political interference and guarantee greater independence.

In supporting the union's calls for worker representation, the Culture Secretary also committed to removing political appointments from the BBC board.

Accurate, fearless reporting

The resignations of director general Tim Davie and head of news Deborah Turness in November caused uncertainty and concern among many 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. The US President's plan to sue the BBC for $5billion in response - 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.

NUJ members at the BBC have questioned 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.

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.

Improved pay, conditions and training

AI-generated news is another significant threat to public trust in journalism. While the NUJ recognises the potential to use artificial intelligence within journalism, it must only be used for public good with human oversight and not as a means to replace the skill, knowledge and experience of journalists.

The BBC should provide training to equip workers with an understanding of the legal, regulatory, and ethical implications of AI usage. The BBC should be an industry-leading employer in the ethical use of AI within its journalism and the wider creative industries, only deploying new technology with proper safeguards and after consultation with workers and their trade union representatives.

The BBC should engage regularly and meaningfully with the NUJ and other unions that comprise the Broadcasting, Entertainment & Arts Unions (BEAU) - who collectively represent thousands of workers at the BBC - to ensure that all workplace AI policies are shaped and signed off by staff. Any collective licensing agreements that would allow the BBC's journalism or archives to be used to train AI must be revocable and aligned with the BBC's public service remit.

While the salaries of the BBC's top earners and senior management attract headlines, most workers have experienced a real-terms pay cut since 2010 due to freezes and reductions to the licence fee. Budgetary pressures, continuous restructures and job cuts have resulted in NUJ members' workloads and stress increasing while their real-terms pay decreases.

There is no mention of trade unions in the Charter Renewal green paper despite unions' fundamental role in representing staff's views and protecting against political or commercial interference as an independent voice for workers within the corporation. The NUJ welcomes the BBC's recognition of trade unions as essential partners for guaranteeing good jobs in its response to the green paper, and urges the government and the corporation to deliver improved pay, conditions, and training to retain staff and uphold journalists' right to report freely - without fear or interference.

The NUJ is working alongside fellow unions and the TUC in its Charter Renewal campaigning. TUC Congress backed a composited NUJ motion pressing the UK government to urgently intervene to stop cuts to public service broadcasters and mobilise public support for BBC workers. The NUJ also launched a joint petition using the TUC's Megaphone platform with the Broadcasting, Entertainment & Arts Unions (Bectu, Equity, the Musicians' Union, Writers' Guild of Great Britain) and Unite.

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.

The NUJ has welcomed the Culture Secretary's constructive engagement with unions on Charter Renewal, while noting that there is not yet clarity on the BBC's long-term financial future and that members need action now. The union was also encouraged to see several of its calls echoed in the recommendations of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport select committee's recent Charter Renewal review, including:

- The government taking back full funding for the BBC World Service.
- Removal of political appointments.
- Consideration of an independent body to appoint the board's chair.
- Work on media literacy "subject to the BBC being resourced sufficiently".
- Valuing Local Radio and the Local Democracy Reporting Service.
- Reforming the licence fee as "the next best step" with consideration given to a household levy as a long-term funding mechanism.

The NUJ urges the government to be bold and back the BBC and its workers, recognising the BBC's inherent value as an essential public service. We call on 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:**
    - Immediate relief through with the government taking back full funding for the World Service and free licences for eligible over 75s
    - Sustainable long-term funding that guarantees jobs, the BBC's universal accessibility and ability to deliver a quality public service.
    - Protection of - and investment in - local, regional, national and international news provision.
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.