



BBC CUTS TARGET BIRMINGHAM MEDIA INDUSTRY

More than 50 jobs in Birmingham are to go under proposed BBC cuts which are hitting grassroots journalism the hardest.

They are part of 450 job cuts being made across the English regions.

These proposals include:

- Scrapping the entire team of 36 journalists on the Birmingham Digital Hub, who produce a major part of the BBC News and Sport websites' output. Without them the BBC's audiences will lose vital coverage of news and sport at a regional, UK-wide and global level.
- The axing of 16 jobs from Midlands Today and the West Midlands online team while the region's current affairs programme Inside Out is to be replaced, placing more journalist' jobs s under threat.
- The 52 jobs at risk represent more than a third of the total estimated 142 post closures proposed across BBC England's TV and Online wing.

The cuts disproportionately target the corporation's Birmingham-based workforce and represent a further decrease in the number of editorial staff based within the Mailbox, following previous rounds of cutbacks. This is despite promises made as far back as the 1990s, and repeated in the early 2000s under the then director general Mark Thompson, not to move network production out of Birmingham.

Of the 36 Birmingham Digital Hub roles slated for closure, three will be saved and relocated to Salford.

Since it was established in 2001, the Birmingham Digital Hub has been instrumental in making the BBC News website the world-class product it is, typically producing many of the Most Read stories of the day. Crucially, it provides 24-hour cover for the English regions and the Nations. Without it, coverage of major stories including the Grenfell disaster, the Manchester Arena bombing, the Reading stabbings and the widespread floods in 2019 and 2020 would have been greatly diminished.

All coverage of non-Premier League sport across England will effectively be scrapped with the axing of the hub's sport arm. A two-person data unit is also under threat, despite

delivering frequent exclusive stories on matters of public accountability to regional and national teams across the whole BBC.

The NUJ recognises the BBC must make financial savings and its services in England cannot be immune to this. But the Birmingham Digital Hub produces significant amounts of content at a relatively small cost.

BBC England's senior managers claim the proposed changes will ensure audiences across the country remain well-connected through a much-reduced digital offering. The truth is audiences will no longer be able to rely on a website that isn't updated overnight and which will no longer provide its current breadth and depth of coverage.

We would ask that you support our campaign to save these services and persuade the BBC to rethink its proposals, which would be damaging for journalism, the West Midlands region and local, national and international audiences alike.

The Covid-19 emergency has shown just how important it is to have trusted news sources and a public service broadcaster which put in a huge range of extra measures to inform, educate and entertain the public during this crisis. The government must properly fund the BBC if it is to remain a world-beating broadcaster.

The government is also culpable by forcing the corporation to take on the welfare benefit of the free TV licences for over-75s. The deal would have cost the corporation £1.3bn over five years, then £750m each year thereafter, rising to £1 billion by the end of the decade. Following consultation, the BBC has started to charge over-75s in receipt of Pension Credit; at a cost of an £250m by 2021/22. The government must pick up this bill – not the TV licence payer.

The government must step forward to fill the present funding gap, rather than inflict further cuts on an already financially challenged BBC. There must then also be a broader debate around the funding of the BBC so that our public service broadcaster can be taken off the critical list with its future health and independence secured.