



An open letter to the Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

The British Broadcasting Challenge: For Us, By Us, About Us.

The British public service broadcasting system is unique in the world. Public ownership, enlightened funding, delegated regulation and institutional independence have meant that the BBC, ITV, C4 and C5 promote quality, diversity, innovation, respectful debate, and trust, as well as pan-UK production and portrayal. They create space for representative British talent, from music and the arts to drama, comedy and journalism. British public service broadcasting is For Us, By Us, and About Us - and underpins the ways in which we as individuals, as nations and regions, relate to each other and to the world. Its independence from government and its commitment to impartiality serve everyone.

These universal principles generate huge shared audience experiences, from natural history and dramas like Dr Who, The Salisbury Poisonings and Downton Abbey to entertainment like Masterchef and I'm A Celebrity. They bring the UK together and export the UK to the world through trusted news and the creation and distribution of formats infused with British sensibilities, such as Bake Off and Strictly. Our PSB based broadcasting industry is a bigger employer than the fishing, shipbuilding or steel industries, supports a world leading independent production sector, and attracts significant inward investment to all corners of the UK.

The UK PSBs' national value has been clear during the pandemic, through the provision of news, innovative educational support, and programmes bringing comfort and relief to millions.

But the very public service principles that have served us so well are under severe threat – not only from the unregulated streaming services and 'click-bait' content of big-tech companies, but also from government. BBC funding has been cut by 30 percent over the past 10 years - further reduced by 'top-slicing' to pay for non-BBC output - and faces more cuts in the next funding settlement. At the same time, the safeguards supporting the PSB structures at ITV, C4 and C5 have been undermined and would be further damaged by the privatisation of C4.

In a post-Brexit, post-Covid world order, the soft power of our public broadcasters are a significant national asset, both politically through the BBC World Service and economically. Yet successive funding cuts have slashed regional and local broadcasting at the very moment when more investment is needed to support local democracy and accountability, while further cuts to the World Service will diminish it at a time when Britain needs it most.

We are concerned that the government is being advised by a panel not set up under the Cabinet Office guidelines, meeting in secret with no public record of its agenda, discussions or recommendations. We take a different view. We believe that this is the moment - in an era of misinformation and the 'weaponised' politicisation of news and opinion – to build up our Great British public service broadcasters rather than diminish them; to stop short-sighted political and financial attacks; to provide a vision for the future that allows our PSB system to grow as a trusted, independent, network that is worthy of the UK, its citizens and the world. We believe this is an opportunity for an open, honest public debate that explores the world class advantages that our unique PSB system gives us now and – with imagination and political will – can give future generations. It's time to look at what we have and construct a shared vision for making it ever better.

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Signed by

- Tony Ageh OBE, Chief Digital Officer, New York Public Library
- Rt Hon Douglas Alexander, former Cabinet minister
- Gurnek Bains, CEO, Global Future Think Tank
- Lionel Barber, Editor of the *Financial Times* 2005-20
- Dr Muhammad Bari MBE FRSA
- Professor Phyllida Barlow CBE RA, artist
- Julian Barnes, author
- Steven Barnett, Professor of Communications (University of Westminster)
- Patrick Barwise, Emeritus Professor of Management and Marketing (London Business School)
- Sir David Bell, Chairman of the *Financial Times* 1996-2009
- Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury
- Baroness Bottomley of Nettlestone
- Peter Bowker, playwright
- William Burdett-Coutts, Artistic Director, Assembly
- Professor Rosie Campbell, Director, Global Institute for Women's Leadership (King's College London)
- Simon Chinn, film producer
- Sir Trevor Chinn, businessman
- Kate Clanchy MBE, author
- Lord Clement-Jones
- Linda Colley CBE, Shelby M.C. Davis 1958 Professor of History (Princeton University)
- Viscount Colville of Culross
- Steve Coogan, actor, comedian and producer
- Lucy Cooke, zoologist and TV documentary producer
- Frank Cottrell-Boyce, author
- Diane Coyle, Bennett Professor of Public Policy (University of Cambridge)
- Colin Crouch FBA, Emeritus Professor of Governance and Public Management (University of Warwick)
- James Curran, Professor of Communications (Goldsmiths, University of London)
- Sir Richard J. Evans FBA, historian
- Baroness Featherstone
- Sean Foley, theatre director
- Lord Foster of Bath
- Neil Gaiman, author
- Andrew Gamble FBA, Professor of Politics (University of Sheffield)
- Timothy Garton Ash, Professor of European Studies (University of Oxford)
- John Gilhooly OBE, CEO and Artistic Director, Wigmore Hall
- Dermot Gleeson, former governor and trustee of the BBC
- Hugh Grant, actor
- Baroness Greender
- Lord Griffiths of Burry Port
- David Harewood MBE, actor
- The Rt Revd Lord Harries of Pentregarth
- Helen Hawkins, arts editor
- Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield
- Sir Lenny Henry, broadcaster
- Jacquie Hughes, former Commissioning Editor, BBC, and Director of Content Policy, Ofcom
- Rosaleen Hughes, former TV producer
- Will Hutton, Co-chair, The Purposeful Company
- Armando Iannucci OBE, writer and filmmaker
- Michael Jacobs, Professor of Political Economy (University of Sheffield)
- Howard Jacobson, author
- Alby James OBE, CEO, Dramatic Encounters
- Sir Mark Jones FRSE, Director of the V&A Museum 2001-11
- Steve Jones FRS, Senior Research Fellow, Department of Genetics, Evolution and Environment (University College London)
- John Kampfner, author, broadcaster and commentator
- Peter Kellner, former Chairman, YouGov
- A. L. Kennedy, author

- Sir Nicholas Kenyon, Managing Director, Barbican Centre
- Lord Kerr of Kinlochard
- Baroness Kidron
- Kwame Kwei-Armah OBE, Artistic Director, Young Vic
- Sir Richard Lambert, Chair, British Museum
- Adrian Lester CBE, actor
- Cat Lewis, CEO, Nine Lives Media
- Lord Liddle
- Lord Lipsey
- Joni Lovenduski FBA, Anniversary Professor of Politics (Birkbeck, University of London)
- Joe Lycett, comedian
- Sir Michael Lyons, Chairman of the BBC Trust 2007-11
- Lord Macdonald of River Glaven QC
- Lindsay Mackie, Partner, New Weather Institute
- Lord Mandelson
- Sir David Manning, British Ambassador to the USA 2003-07
- Dame Hilary Mantel FRSL, author
- Professor Helen Margetts OBE, Director of Public Policy, Alan Turing Institute
- Mariana Mazzucato, Professor in the Economics of Innovation and Public Value (University College London)
- Robin McAlpine, Director of Common Weal Think Tank 2014-21
- Bill McGuire, Emeritus Professor of Earth Sciences (University College London)
- Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall
- Lord McNally
- Caroline Michel, CEO, Peters Fraser Dunlop
- Professor Tariq Modood, Director, Centre for the Study of Ethnicity and Citizenship (University of Bristol)
- Nadifa Mohamed FRSL, novelist
- Tom Morris OBE, Artistic Director, Bristol Old Vic
- Lord Myners
- Sian Nicholas, Reader, Modern British History (Aberystwyth University)
- Baroness O'Neill of Bengarve
- Peter Osborne, journalist
- David Olusoga, Professor of Public History (University of Manchester)
- Sir David Omand, Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator 2002-05
- Paco Peña, flamenco composer and guitarist
- Norma Percy, TV documentary producer
- Max Porter, author
- Lord Puttnam
- Baroness Quin
- Mark Ravenhill, playwright
- Baroness Rebuck
- Lord Rees of Ludlow, Astronomer Royal
- David Richards CBE, Chairman, Motorsport UK
- Hannah Rothschild CBE, author
- Alan Rusbridger, Editor-in-Chief of the *Guardian* 1995-2015
- Sir Salman Rushdie, author
- Professor Meg Russell FBA, Director, Constitution Unit (University College London)
- Marcus Ryder MBE, Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity
- Colin Salmon, actor
- Philippe Sands QC, lawyer, writer and President, English PEN
- Sir John Sawers, British Ambassador to the UN 2007-09 and Chief of MI6 2009-14
- Sir Simon Schama FBA, historian
- Jess Search, CEO, Doc Society
- Jean Seaton, Professor of Media History (University of Westminster)
- Elif Shafak, author
- Michael Sheen, actor
- Owen Sheers, novelist, poet and playwright
- Lionel Shriver, author
- Andrew Simms, Co-director, New Weather Institute

- Lord Smith of Finsbury
- Lord Stevenson of Coddendam
- John Sweeney, investigative journalist
- Meera Syal CBE, comedian
- Josh Tulloch
- Lord Turner of Ecchinswell
- Chris Waiting, CEO, The Conversation UK
- Sir Mark Walport FRS, Chief Scientific Adviser 2013-17 and CEO, UK Research and Innovation 2017-20
- Alan Ware, Emeritus Professor (Worcester College, Oxford)
- Benjamin Wegg-Prosser, Director of Strategic Communications for the Prime Minister 2005-07
- Anthony Whitworth-Jones, opera manager
- Sarah Woods, playwright
- Peter York, author and consultant
- Gary Younge, Professor of Sociology (University of Manchester)
- Patrick Younge, Managing Director, Cardiff Productions