



4/12/23

Sir,

I read with considerable alarm your report of 4 December that the government is poised to renege on its funding agreement with the BBC.

On January 17th 2022 the then Secretary for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Nadine Dorries MP, told Parliament that the BBC licence fee was to be frozen for two years from April 2022, but would then rise in line with inflation for the following four years starting April 2024. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/dcms-secretary-of-states-oral-statement-on-the-licence-fee-settlement>)

The BBC has kept its side of the bargain, making significant reductions in highly valued services ranging from local radio and news through to children's programming and sport. It has been forced to do so while incurring significant additional costs through coverage of two major conflicts, in Ukraine and now the Middle East, neither of which would have featured in any business plan. We are now seeing how a 31% cut in the real value of the BBC licence fee (at 2010 prices the licence fee would be £230 today) impacts on BBC output across its services - the recent cuts to Newsnight are only one example among many.

Every day British audiences face a barrage of algorithm-driven, mis- and disinformation from tech platforms owned by foreign billionaires in the US and China. The BBC, notwithstanding its occasional faults, is more important than ever for its ability to distribute impartial news globally and its role in supporting social cohesion at home. Now is not the time for the Government to behave disreputably and break the firm promise it made to Parliament. It must keep its word and honour its commitment to increase the licence fee by the rate of inflation from 2024. Failure to do so will further undermine the ability of the BBC to fulfil its purpose and weaken its independence. This will be the first major test for the new Chair of the BBC, whose appointment is imminent. We hope they will be up to the job.

Yours Sincerely

Pat Younge  
Chair, British Broadcasting Challenge