



AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE UK'S DEMOCRACY,  
CREATIVE ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

March 2024

# A BBC for the future

A hundred years ago, the BBC launched a new world of UK radio broadcasting. Today, the media world is utterly different. Audiences have access to an incredible variety of media: text, video, audio, social, immersive and interactive content from across the world.

What is the BBC's role today, and in the future? More than 100 years on from its foundation, what can it do for the UK to respond to the most pressing needs of our democracy, our creative economy and our society?

In recent years the BBC has been transforming to remain a part of audiences' daily lives by seeking to offer outstanding value to everyone. But a new wave of technological change is reshaping our media landscape. It brings huge benefits to consumers, with more choice than ever before. But it brings, too, fresh challenges for our media, our society and us as individuals:

- ¥ The challenge to our democracy: Disinformation, propaganda and partial news is weakening our shared understanding of the world, undermining trust in our institutions and our democratic processes. It leaves many of us wondering who and what we can believe, and even questioning the concept of 'truth'
- ¥ The challenge to our creative economy: British storytelling is at growing risk of being squeezed out in an extraordinarily competitive global media landscape. We are in danger of allowing the UK's world-class creative industries to be significantly

This document sets out how the BBC plans to focus on these three roles to provide value for all audiences in the years ahead and the steps required to accelerate its transformation.

We will harness cutting -edge technologies to deliver our universal mission. Human creativity and talent will always sit at the heart of all we do , but we will maximise the potential of artificial

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## 2 Pursue truth with no agenda by reporting fearlessly and fairly

### The challenge to democracy

Around the world democracy is under threat. The most recent report from Freedom House found that only 20% of people live in what are considered to be free countries – a proportion that has halved over a decade. In 2023, global freedom declined for the 18th consecutive year, as political rights and civil liberties deteriorated in 52 countries, representing a fifth of the world's population. The declines were both widespread and severe, eclipsing the improvements observed in 21 other countries. Freedom declined for 22% of the world's population, and improved for only 7%.

Suppressing the right to free expression is a key driver of democratic decline. Freedom House analysis suggests that over the past 18 years, the number of countries and territories that receive a score of 0 out of 4 on their media freedom indicator has more than doubled from 14 to 36, as journalists face persistent attacks from autocrats and their supporters while receiving inadequate protection from intimidation and violence, even in some democracies. The World Press Freedom Index from Reporters Without Borders shows that journalism is now





Source: FT analysis (26 May 2023) from YouGov data. (Net trust = the proportion of people who regard a media organisation as trustworthy minus the proportion of people who regard it as untrustworthy.)

This is a very different picture from the US, where levels of polarisation between each side about each news provider are sharper. No news source is used frequently by more than around a quarter of the public. The effects of this news landscape are visible in the political debate, high levels of polarisation and impacts on citizens in the US.

eroding. The BBC believes that truth is worth fighting for , even if it can be elusive, and a healthy democracy is worth defending and upholding.

What the BBC

### 3 Back the best British storytelling by investing in homegrown talent and creativity

#### The challenge to our creative economy

We live in a time when culture and creativity cross national borders frictionlessly . There are



We contribute almost £5 billion to the UK economy each year, supporting over 50,000 jobs and working with 14,000 suppliers, 75% of which are





## Why the BBC is uniquely positioned to help

The BBC is a universal service. We aim to connect, not divide; to bring together , not separate.

We think about the BBC's universal mission in three ways.

First, the BBC must be relevant to all . While others target profitable parts of the market and ignore other parts, we create a wide range of content that means the BBC can appeal to all UK audiences, across all our local communities . Research shows that the clear majority of the public from all parts of UK society think the BBC informs, educates and entertains the people in the UK/ them .



broadcaster to deliver major events with a special commentary for blind and visually impaired audiences. We provided British Sign Language (BSL) on all Government Covid briefings and have signed events such as HM Queen Elizabeth II's Funeral, the Coronation, Trooping the Colour, every main stage performance at Glastonbury, the semi-finals and final of the Eurovision Song Contest and the Coronation Concert. In 2022/23 87% of the iPlayer catalogue was subtitled, equating to 50,866 programmes. Viewers have the ability to change and control the size of the subtitles, so that they can personalise their viewing experience.

Third, we aim for the BBC to have universal engagement, and up to nine in ten UK adults use us on average per week, and 95% per month. Without universal engagement, the most trusted news and British storytelling will be removed from the consumption habits of the UK public. The BBC is still the UK's most-used brand for media, but increasingly US tech giants are pushing other

Ipsos iris Online Audience Measurement Service, January 2023- December 2023, UK Only, All aged 15+ using PC/laptop, smartphone or tablet(s). Methodology available: <https://ukom.uk.net/ipsos-iris-overview.php>

## 5 Transforming the BBC for audiences

This chapter sets out how the BBC plans to focus on each of these three roles to increase the unique value we provide to audiences in the years ahead. It outlines the steps the BBC will need to take to accelerate its transformation.

### 5.1 Harness cutting -edge technology to deliver our mission and pursue truth

- ! We will develop three online news brands to enhance our digital news services: in verification (BBC Verify), investigatBBC

to bias in output. We will be transparent , sharing our work and approach externally . We will

Gen AI both operationally and creatively. We have recently shared our editorial guidance on AI usage and our wider approach to responsible AI. Over the coming months , we will publish research on audience attitudes to Gen AI that can help other media companies. We will hold an industry -wide event on the impact and potential for Gen AI in media.

### 5.3 Invest in content that connects us

- 1.! We will invest in output that can bring communities together . 2024 promises a calendar of huge sporting events, from the FA Cup to the Men's Euros in Germany,



we work, and the internet -based services that manage every element of how we create value for audiences. Whether it is creating text, image, video and audio, or all the way through to final distribution, we will make each element of the process digital -

and drama, to new UK comedy. The BBC Three linear channel will remain to curate the very best BBC TV for younger audiences .

To drive greater impact with audiences, we are also proposing to reshape our news offer in Scotland. Subject to regulatory approval, we will approval,



services at exceptional value for money with the licence fee priced well below a bundle of equivalent advertising-free subscription services. Our public funding has also served as investment capital for the UK's creative industries; it has stimulated commercial investment; driven economic growth; and complemented the business models of other broadcasters.

But just as the BBC has evolved and changed over its 100-year history, so has the way it has been funded. Over the past few years, we have seen reforms to the licence fee, adding in on-demand iPlayer and the BBC paying for free TV licences for over-75s on Pension Credit. This continues a journey of reform that goes back to when the BBC was first funded by a royalty on wireless-receiving sets. We want to ensure that the way we are funded is fit for purpose for the future.

We are clear that substantial public funding is vital to the BBC's future to allow us to deliver our public service mission.

As part of this , we will engage with the work currently being done by Government to review BBC methods of funding.

We will also discuss with the Government how to support the World Service . The BBC World Service is a priceless national asset. In the age of disinformation, it offers an extraordinary

A BBC that is the foundation for thriving UK cultural and creative industries

This document has already outlined the BBC's critical role in the creative industries:

- ✘ The single largest investor in original UK content
- ✘ Contributing almost £5 billion a year to the UK economy each year, with 50% of its economic impact generated outside London, compared with a sector average of 20%
- ✘ For every £1 of the BBC's direct economic activity, generating £2.63 in the UK economy as a whole
- ✘ Supporting over 50,000 jobs around the country.

We will continue to run the BBC effectively and efficiently , benchmark ing the costs of running the publicly funded parts of the organisation