



Response to the DCMS Consultation on the decriminalisation of the Television Licence Fee

The Children's Media Foundation acts in the interests of young people in the UK when their access to a range of quality, relevant content is compromised or threatened. This is our response to the DCMS consultation on decriminalisation of the television licence fee. We give permission for publication.

We believe that the proposal to decriminalise the TV licence fee at this stage threatens the BBC's capacity to provide much-valued content for children and young people and should not be pursued in its current form.

For us there are two issues:

1. Maintaining BBC levels of funding so that there need be no cuts to children's and youth services.
2. The timing of the consultation.

1. It is clear that decriminalisation will have revenue consequences. Budget cuts will follow and these will in part impact on children's audiences. It is unacceptable (and we would suggest would also be seen as unacceptable by parents, who are at this time watching with their children more than ever before) to compromise the BBC's capacity to provide a range of content on CBeebies, child-friendly information from Newsround, a comprehensive BBC Learning package, high quality factual, drama or entertainment for the younger audience and new content for teens.

2. We consider the timing of the consultation to be the key issue. Clearly now is not the time to put the Corporation through major upheavals in its funding structure.

But that aside, we are surprised at the haste with which this proposal is being pursued. We take issue with the short 8 week consultation period. Why is that necessary? We also take issue with the fact that the 2015 Perry Review concluded there was no current need for change. Since little has altered in the meantime, we see no reason why decriminalisation needs to be addressed now, and could not be held over until the next full licence fee review. There is a danger that once again hasty decisions are about to be taken which will have severe effects on the Corporation finances, and in the end also on its younger audience, when there is no urgent need for change, and without sufficient public scrutiny.

The Children's Media Foundation does not rule out the exploration of alternative funding methods for the BBC, or public service content in general. But this needs to be done as part of a comprehensive package of reforms, consulted upon for an appropriate period, and with fewer implications for the BBC's revenue so that we can be confident their commitment to young people can continue to be fulfilled.