

Championing Excellence and Diversity in Broadcasting Autumn 2015

Bulletin 118

WHAT DO WE REALLY WANT FROM THE BBC?

The consultation period on the Government's Green Paper on the Future of the BBC has now closed, but the process continues.

BRITISH BOLD CREATIVE In launching the BBC Executive's response to the Green Paper, BBC Director-General Tony Hall said "The BBC is approaching its

centenary in 2022 and the decisions taken over the coming months will shape the BBC for the next generation. If we make the right choices now, Britain can have a BBC that excels globally a BBC that is a powerhouse for creative and economic growth for the whole of the United Kingdom. The BBC belongs to the public. We are stewards for an institution that they cherish." The proposals, set out in *British, Bold, Creative,* reflect the BBC's aim of maintaining its existing role as a broadcaster of world-class radio and TV, while also continuing to meet the challenges of the internet age successfully.

The BBC Trust is now consulting on the Executive's proposals. Submissions need to be returned by **5 November 2015**. They are



organising a programme of audience research and economic analysis and a series of public seminars and reports of the first two

meetings are on their website. Meetings are being held over the next four weeks in Belfast, Birmingham, Sunderland and Glasgow. Several VLV members attended the meetings. The Trust has also published independent research on future funding options and on the impact of BBC online on local news papers and of BBC TV on news and entertainment programmes from commercial broadcasters. The proposals, background, details of how to take part in the consultation or to apply for tickets to the meetings can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/trust/governance/ tomorrowsbbc.

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PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING -FUTURE UNCERTAIN? VLV's 32nd Annual Autumn Conference Tuesday 1 December 2015

The Geological Society, Piccadilly, London W1J 0BG 10.15 am - 3.30 pm



The VLV is delighted that BBC Trust Chairman Rona Fairhead will be the keynote speaker at our Autumn Conference. At this crucial time in the BBC's history she says "I can't think of many

more important organisations to work for than the BBC. It remains one of the great British institutions, respected around the world and much loved at home. It is a huge privilege to be able to represent the interests of audiences and to help ensure the BBC maintains its reputation quality and innovation, its for editorial independence, and its critical role in supporting the UK creative sector as a whole." Other sessions will look at Channel 4, radio and our regular Three Wise People panel exploring the latest concerns in the Charter Review debate. Look at VLV's website for updates.

NEW SHADOW CMS SPOKESMAN

Michael Dugher, MP for Barnsley East since 2010, was appointed Shadow Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport in the reshuffle by Jeremy Corbyn. He has been Shadow Transport Secretary and Minister for the



Cabinet Office, Shadow Minister without Portfolio and Vice-Chair of the Labour Party.

The 13th Annual General Meeting of Voice of the Listener & Viewer Ltd will be held on Tuesday 1 December 2015 at 4.00 pm at The Geological Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1J 0BG

Nominations and resolutions should be sent to the Chairman at VLV, The Old Rectory Business Centre, Springhead Road, Northfleet, Kent DA11 8HN no fewer than three and not more than 21 days before the AGM. Papers for the AGM will be emailed in advance and copies by post will be available on request by contacting Sue Washbrook at the VLV office.



Voice of the Listener & Viewer

Championing Excellence and Diversity in Broadcasting

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Voice of the Listener & Viewer (VLV) represents the citizen and consumer interests in broadcasting and works for quality and diversity in British broadcasting. VLV is free from political, sectarian and commercial affiliations. VLV is concerned with the issues, structures, institutions and regulation that underpin the British broadcasting system and in particular to maintain the principles of public service broadcasting.

VLV does not handle complaints.

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FROM THE CHAIRMAN, COLIN BROWNE



We understand there have been some 190,000 responses to the consultation by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport on the future of the BBC. That extraordinary level of response to what was a relatively user-unfriendly document shows more clearly than any public opinion survey the place the BBC occupies in the consciousness of the nation.

The VLV has made a detailed response, which you will find on our website, and I know that many members have submitted personal responses.

Thank you to all of you – more than 200 – who returned our questionnaire. You will see that your responses are fully reflected in our submission.

We consider ourselves as a 'critical friend' of the BBC, as the cornerstone of public service broadcasting in the United Kingdom. Our concern with the Green Paper was that, tonally – despite a supportive forward by John Whittingdale, the Secretary of State – the detailed text seemed to focus on what the BBC should do less. It does not explore in an open-minded way the opportunities for it to continue to contribute to the quality of life and debate in the United Kingdom, while adjusting to the rapidly changing consumer and technological environment; and of course the parameters of the debate were set by the prior deal on funding, reached in July with no public consultation or debate, despite previous assurances to the contrary.

Our support for the BBC is certainly not uncritical. The charge of 'imperialism' has more than a grain of truth. Sometimes the BBC seems to think that it needs to do everything for everyone. In a healthy mixed ecology of broadcasting, that should not be the case. However, it certainly needs to provide *something* for everyone, including popular entertainment programming, provided this is distinctive and of high quality. If it does not do this, the case for universality, based on a universal funding mechanism, will be seriously undermined. In this context, the BBC's focus in its public statements on providing a personalised service, using the internet, causes us some concerns, as it could be used by its critics as pointing the way to a subscription-based service.

Responding to the Green Paper, and to the other consultations from the House of Lords Communications Committee, the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee and the BBC Trust, has meant an incredible amount of work for us and especially for Sophie Chalk, our Public Affairs Manager, to whom I would like to pay particular thanks. We have been able to afford to employ Sophie and a part-time Communications Consultant, Moira Stuart, thanks to the fundraising of Trustee Patrick McIntosh and also to a grant from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, to whom we are tremendously grateful. The grant was to help us in the task of trying to ensure that the citizen's voice is heard in the debate around these important decisions on the future of public service broadcasting. I think the importance of our contribution is widely recognised, but there is still much to do.

MAKING SURE VIEWERS AND LISTENERS ARE HEARD

VLV's most recent submission was in response to DCMS's Green Paper on the Future of the BBC. The key points made in the VLV's response are:

- We need to protect the BBC's independence from government in order to maintain its credibility and integrity
- There should be no more top slicing of the licence fee of the kind seen in the settlements of 2010 and 2015
- The BBC needs to have enough funding to remain of a scale to be able to deliver its mission to a range of audiences
- The BBC needs to continue to work hard to provide a range of high quality and distinctive content which appeals to a wide range of audiences, is universally available and is free at the point of access
- While ensuring it successfully engages younger audiences, the BBC must ensure that it continues to deliver content which is universally available free-to-air on television and radio
- The VLV is also proposing changes to the BBC's governance, with the creation of a new public interest body to represent the interests of licence payers.

VLV MEMBERS' VIEWS

The VLV's submission includes details of the survey conducted with VLV members, who come out strongly in support of the licence fee as the best way to fund the BBC and are in favour of reform for BBC governance (see page 4).

BBC GOVERNANCE

To inform its decision on the best model for BBC governance, VLV brought together leading figures in the broadcasting policy world. While there was some consensus, there are still many issues which remain unresolved. There is no easy answer to the question of the best way to govern the BBC. It is a unique institution and many of the existing models of governance and regulation simply do not apply. However, VLV has come to some preliminary conclusions which were included in its submissions to the House of Lords Communications Committee and the CMS Select Committee.

The VLV believes that the BBC should have a unitary board with non-executive Chair, a majority of nonexecutive board members and that this board should be responsible for the running of the BBC. VLV also proposed that a separate, independent body should be established to build on the valuable work the BBC Trust has begun in consulting with licence fee payers, assessing whether the BBC is fulfilling its public purposes and holding the corporation to account. Separately, the VLV proposed that Ofcom should take on all content regulation for the BBC.

LICENCE FEE BODY

The VLV is proposing the establishment of a statutory body, the Licence Fee Body, to determine the level of future licence fee settlements. This would help to underpin the independence of the BBC, including protection from political decisions by the government of the day to 'top slice' the licence fee and divert it to fund other projects.

The Licence Fee Body would comprise a chair and other members who have the requisite expertise and knowledge and are independent of government, the BBC and of other media organizations. It would consult with the public and recommend a level for the licence fee. The Secretary of State would have a duty to lay this recommendation before Parliament. VLV has sponsored the preparation of a Draft Bill to give effect to this proposal.

In its submissions to the Parliamentary Committees, the VLV stresses that the BBC needs to continue to work hard to provide a range of high quality content which appeals to a wide range of audiences, is universally available and is free at the point of access.

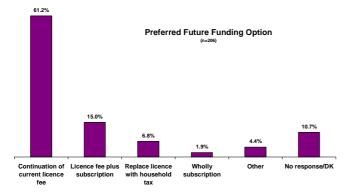
'While it would be against the public interest to impose artificial reductions on the present scale and scope of the BBC, it must ensure that it is providing content and services that are genuinely distinctive. In order to justify the significant intervention in the market implicit in the BBC's funding, the BBC needs to provide services which lead those of the UK's other broadcasters and add value to our lives and society as a whole' said VLV Chairman Colin Browne.

VLV'S QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE FUTURE OF THE BBC: THE RESULTS

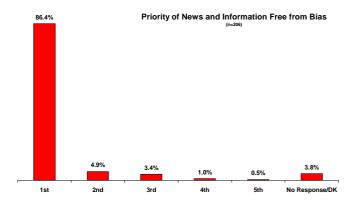
Thank you to everyone who completed our recent questionnaire on the BBC's future. The purpose of the research was to establish what VLV members think about the funding of the BBC, the BBC's purpose and the governance of the organisation. These issues are particularly impactful at this time with the BBC Charter due for renewal.

VLV members made up 98% of respondents and the overall response rate was 35%. Many VLV members voiced that they wanted to say more than the questionnaire allowed or that the offered answers did not fit with their views. A few respondents left some parts blank or were unable to give an answer. All these factors are recognised as normal challenges in the way this type of market research is carried out.

On the issue of funding, a 61.2% majority were in favour of retaining the current licence fee funding model. However, 15% believed an element of subscription should be added. Household tax was seen by 6.8% to be an option with less than 2% favouring subscription only.

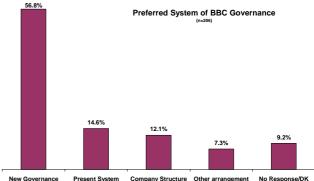


With reference to the BBC's purpose we asked what respondents thought about ten types of programming. Overwhelmingly 93.2% felt that news and information being free from bias was very important. News was also ranked by over 86% as the most important genre of programming on the BBC, with global news also considered very important by over 60%.



Over 80% thought the value of bringing the country together was very important or important. The arts, nature, science and the environment along with children's programming were also considered a priority. Popular entertainment was viewed as important by over half of those surveyed.

Fewer respondents favoured sport as being important, however, more than half believe bringing a wide range of sport was valuable. Similarly being innovative with new media was not considered as being a priority.



New Governance Present System Company Structure Other arrangement No Response/DK Body

The final question concerned the governance of the BBC. Over 56% want a new governance body, 14.6% would like to retain the present system and 12.1% support a company structure. The remaining respondents wanted a different arrangement or offered no alternative.

The questionnaire was mailed to all VLV members in August 2015. Responses were analysed in September 2015 and the results were published. The full report can be read on the VLV website.

The Trustees would like to thank VLV members Dr Graham Mytton and Peter Menneer for devising the questionnaire and compiling the results.

VLV RESPONSES TO RECENT CONSULTATIONS

In a very busy few months the VLV has submitted papers to the House of Lords Communications Committee on the BBC's Public Purpose and Licence Fee, the Government's Green Paper on BBC Charter Review, the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee's Charter Review inquiry, the BBC Trust's Charter Review as well as papers on BBC Three, BBC One, BBC iPlayer and CBBC, Local Radio, Local News and Current Affairs in England and technical Ofcom on Spectrum Sharing papers to Framework and 700MHz clearance. All responses are available on VLV's website.



CHANNEL 4 - WHERE NEXT? A personal view by journalist Maggie Brown

As Lord Burns steps down from chairing Channel 4, he ought to depart with applause ringing in his ears for a six year term

which has been pretty successful. This former Treasury big hitter selected a canny chief executive, David Abraham, who has guided the broadcaster through a prolonged period of cold turkey, post Big Brother, partly by using its excellent sales force to service UKTV and BT Sport and driving turnover to almost a billion pounds a year. Opinion may still divide over the state of creative renewal and the powerful figure of creative director Jay Hunt. But it has a 10 year licence renewed until 2025, and is seemingly succeeding in modestly cranking up the main channel's audience share. By relying on self help it has banished the begging bowl and buried a strange fantasy cooked up by the former regime that by now it would be in financial freefall, unless public assistance was forthcoming. Of course, it is far from a perfect broadcaster but it has plenty of public service programming in the main evening schedules, headed by Channel 4 News, Unreported World and Dispatches and awards suggest a lot is going well.

But we all know, thanks to a vigilant photographer in September, that it has been rewarded for this self help by becoming a candidate for potential privatisation, the thing self sufficiency was meant to avoid. The Shareholder Executive, which holds publicly owned assets, is poring over its accounts (with the BBC Charter Renewal generating such a volume of debate you have to wonder whether throwing Channel 4's fate into the mix is sensible). And yet, while this growing cloud must seem so unfair, can something positive for viewers emerge?

First of all, the Channel 4 Corporation has always faced questions: ownership has been a quietly ticking issue since the late 1980s. Channel 4 was sized up for possible sale in 1988/9 and again in 1996, when it became clear that it was profiting very handsomely from assuming control of advertising sales, so much so that it diversified rather wastefully into digital channels to soak up the cash. An attempt to merge with far weaker Channel Five was proposed in 2003/4, after the 2001 induced advertising hiccup, but was roundly seen off by the board and Ofcom. At that point the merger of advertising sales forces was seen to make sense in the face of a consolidated ITV. But on the programme commissioning side, Channel 4 continues to have a remit that is not geared to maximise financial returns.

However, reading back through annual reports, I note that under Burns and Abraham, Channel 4 has prominently labelled itself as a not-for-profit organisation (though this emerged back in 1989) with Burns going further this year by suggesting it should operate under some form of Trust. Perhaps the best defence long term is to set Channel 4 Corporation realistic profit margins, say five per cent, with the resulting annual dividend going into a separately administered fund for creative investment. It would provide clarity, allow the Government freedom to cut its arts spending by a commensurate amount, and hopefully save Channel 4 from an outright sale. Just a thought.....

TRIBUTE TO DAVID EGGINGTON



VLV Trustee David Eggington, who died in August, was a lovely, unselfish man who cared about the really important things and exhibited the kind of decency and compassion that is so often missing from our present society. A greatly loved husband and

father, he is survived by his wife Elspeth and sons Stephen and Simon.

I first met him when he organised a meeting in Sheffield addressed by the late Jocelyn Hay. That encouraged me to rejoin VLV, having lapsed because of work and professional activities. A member of VLV for over 15 years, David helped arrange events in Sheffield and Manchester. His contributions were both practical and intellectual. He was always enthusiastic whether contributing ideas, designing a VLV banner or producing an ancient radio to illustrate the history of PSB. He led VLV visits often in the North of England, and following one to BBC Radio Merseyside became a volunteer member of the station's 'A' Team answering listeners' queries. People quickly warmed to David and VLV member Leah Fleetwood recounts how he enthusiastically entertained an appreciative crowd, including several enraptured children, by playing one of the public pianos at St Pancras Station.

David spent most of his professional life in careers guidance, a service damaged when the Coalition Government decided English local authorities no longer needed to provide a universal careers service. David never stopped caring about that service or the young people who needed it but also willingly gave his time to support public service broadcasting, public libraries, Green and other issues. Like others, I have lost a good friend. VLV and those who support its values have lost a passionate and committed supporter of PSB.

Bob Usherwood

CHARTER REVIEW AND BBC CHILDREN'S CONTENT - BEWARE THE TROJAN HORSE!

Before the publication of the Government's Charter Review Public Consultation in July, few would have anticipated that children's content would occupy such an important place in it. But there it is on Page 54, and everyone who values the BBC should take note. It says:

> "children's programming is an area in which the BBC has a near monopoly, as highlighted in the most recent Ofcom PSB Review, and a small amount of contestable funding could introduce greater diversity of providers and greater plurality in public services provision."

That statement, combined with a question about whether funding should be protected (or ringfenced) and made available to others, rings very loud alarm bells – both for the future of the BBC and by extension also for children's content, because however those who argue for it label it, the Green Paper *explicitly* asks 'whether there is a case for alternative providers to be able to access an element of this funding' (i.e. licence fee income). The overall tone of the Green Paper seems to be lining up children's programming as a potential Trojan Horse to cut the BBC down to size.

A children's production industry letter (*Broadcast* 14 September), wants to maintain the current BBC children's budget, but also raises the issue of contestable funding. The letter is somewhat ambiguous and without addressing alternatives for funding, it may, even if unwittingly, strengthen the argument for top-slicing, and this is questionable on several counts.

First, it is debateable under the Charter whether governments should really be deciding how an independent BBC should spend licence fee funds. Who decides what needs ring-fencing and by how much? Who decides whether the BBC should stop making *Match of the Day* or *The Voice*, incidentally programmes that children and adults enjoy together, because two-thirds of children's viewing is of nonchildren's programming. If governments of whatever persuasion start to determine what content the BBC should spend money on, then this will not stop here, diminishing the BBC's independence and confidence over time, as both popular and market failure content is stripped away.

Second, the problem afflicting local children's production is a global industry problem, not a BBC problem. That statement about the BBC having a monopoly over children's programming is simply not true. It does makes 88% of UK-originated programming, but that is because commercially-funded players simply will not commission much,

not helped by policies that have included a ban on advertising for junk food since 2007 and the removal of children's quotas for commercial PSBs (ITV, Channel 4, Five) in the 2003 Communications Act.

Third, the way that contestable funding is being pushed in the Green Paper will lead inexorably to top-slicing to pay for it; and that diminishes financial provision for the whole production industry, for whom the BBC is their biggest commissioner. What are the other options? Nobody has told us – lottery funding, the Arts Council, levies on commercial players, the Treasury, reintroducing quotas for commercial PSBs? None of these options are being seriously considered.

Fourth, there are issues at the BBC about the transparency of commissioning and the role of inhouse production. But the danger is that over time contestable funding would turn the BBC into US style PBS - starved of funding, good programming and ultimately audiences. Would it not be better for independent producers and their representatives to look more closely at the sourcing of programming, pressuring the BBC to open up more commissioning to competition, where independents are beating in-house producers hands down with 62% of the 50% of hours that are open to competition (WOCC)? Would it not make more sense to push for tighter BBC Service Licences in terms of levels of funding and the delivery of particular sub-genres like drama? However, these are things that must not be imposed by governments through the manipulation of funding. The BBC needs to put its own house in order.

The crisis in the children's television production industry is real, but less is heard from parents and children who are not complaining about an advertising free children's service that still offers a range of output including UK news and drama. The Green Paper provokes little discussion about what a public service commitment to children means, and not just in television, but across a variety of platforms and services - because without that connection to a broad range of quality content, children will see no need to engage with the BBC as adults and may have abandoned it by the time the next Charter rolls along in 2027. Contestable funding drawn from licence fee income is the thin end of the wedge, and those who wish the BBC to continue as a key player in the cultural life of this nation should beware, however tempting it is in the short term.

Based on a presentation by **Professor Jeanette Steemers** at *Staring into the Abyss: Where will Children's TV be in 10 Years* and published on <u>www.opendemocracy.net/ourbeeb</u>

THE VOICE OF THE UNDER 25s

To put it bluntly, I am tired of coming home from college on a Wednesday afternoon, picking up the television remote and turning on the likes of BBC One to find absolutely nothing to watch. I feel as if the BBC acknowledges the existence of three year old Tommy and 40 year old Claire and completely disregards the fact that I might be at home, endlessly searching for something to fill the empty void of boredom that is my Wednesday evening.

The BBC has previously stated that it faces 'growing challenges' to engage a younger audience and this is not at all hard to believe. I rarely pick up the television remote with complete anticipation to sit down to an evening of Downton Abbey or Dragon's Den - it just doesn't appeal to my 18 year old self.

BBC Radio is a completely different story, in my opinion. BBC Radio for all intents and purposes is great. Although the diversity in the genre of music they play is sometimes lacking, the overall feel of radio is much more accessible for me as Radio 1 and 1 Extra are definitely targeted at a younger audience. I regularly tune into Nick Grimshaw's Radio 1 Breakfast Show in the morning, it's easy to listen to and there is a mix of different music to get to grips with. I tend to avoid Radios 2, 3, 4 and 5 as the content does not really appeal to me; however I do like listening to Jeremy Vine over on Radio 2 at lunchtime. Vine usually discusses the current headlines in the news and his listeners are welcome to share their views. However, the majority of the contributors are usually over 30. Coincidence? I think not.

So what has the BBC got to offer young people such as myself? I spoke to 23 year old Oliver Morris from Bedford to see exactly what he had to say on the subject. Oliver told me that he feels he can no longer listen to Radio 1 as it 'drives him crazy' yet finds that the likes of Radios 2 and 4 do not appeal to him as he's still too young to listen to their content. I asked him whether he had listened to Radio 4 and he responded 'that's what I did, I went to Radio 4 looking for intelligent programmes and I got told I'm an idiot.'

Obviously the BBC did not literally call him an idiot, but I got the impression that he thinks that the content could be somewhat more accessible for younger listeners without being too specialised in regards to the topics they discuss. Oliver added it feels 'unfair' that a young person like him struggles to find a radio station that he enjoys listening to.

I really hope the BBC will lean towards producing more radio shows and programmes that the younger audience might actually enjoy in the future. I guess I'll just have to settle for Antiques Roadshow for the time being.



Amy Machaj and Oliver Morris are young journalists Podium.me with the independent audio platform Podium.me. Set up in 2013 by Camilla Byk, the team of young reporters

make the kind of radio that they want to hear, in the form of daily podcasts.

NEWS IN BRIEF

LENNY HENRY CALLS FOR RING-FENCED Lenny Henry has called for the FUNDING creation of a ring-fenced fund for BAME television projects. He has been critical of the BAME targets which have been introduced by mainstream He is cynical about quotas, broadcasters. believing they can become about quantity and not quality and joked that the BBC's £2.1m creative diversity development fund could end up being spent solely on weathermen purely to fill the quota.

WIDER SPECTRUM GROUP Chairman Colin Browne was a Panel speaker at a Brussels seminar organised by the Wider Spectrum Group, ahead of crucial decisions on the future use of spectrum. Keynote speakers at the seminar, which was attended by EU officials, MEPs and decision makers across the AV sector, were Pascal Lamy, former EU Commissioner for Trade and author of the Lamy Report on the Future of the UHF Band; and Guenther Oettinger, Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society. Speakers underlined the importance of safeguarding spectrum for free-to air terrestrial broadcasting, in the face of growing demand from the mobile network operators.

BBC SPEECH RADIO ONLINE The BBC Trust has approved the online premiering of BBC speech radio, enabling programmes from Radio 4 and other radio stations to be made available online up to seven days before broadcast. These changes form part of the Trust's service review of Radio 4, 5 live and the digital stations Radio 4 Extra and 5 live Sports Extra. Over 5,000 people took part in the public consultation and 2,000 people across the country were involved in audience research.

LET THE POWERS THAT BE KNOW There will a further 6 - 8 months of consultation about the future of the BBC. In addition to VLV 's work representing members' interests, it is crucial to let Parliamentarians know what we, listeners and viewers, want. Send your MP your views and what you want from the BBC in the next 10 years.

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Please refer to VLV when responding to advertisements. VLV cannot accept any liability or complaint in regard to the following offers. The charge for classified ads is 30p per word, 20p for members. Please send typed copy with a cheque payable to VLV. For display space please contact Sue Washbrook on 01474 338716.



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Keeping up to date with the BBC Charter Review VLV will be sending out regular updates by email - so please ensure that Sue Washbrook has your up-to-date email address or else keep looking at the website www.vlv.org.uk

Diary Dates

Tuesday 1 December 2015 VLV's 32nd Autumn Conference Public Service Broadcasting: Future Uncertain? The Geological Society, Piccadilly, London W1J 0BG 10.15 am - 3.30 pm

Keynote Speaker: **Rona Fairhead**, Chairman of the BBC Trust Further details to be announced

Tuesday 1 December 2015 4.00 pm - for Members only

The 13th Annual General Meeting of Voice of the Listener & Viewer Ltd will be held at 4.00 pm on Tuesday 1 December 2015 after the conference. There will also be a Members' Forum.

.VLV will be announcing other events over the next few months watch email alerts and the website for details

VLV's Awards for Excellence in Broadcasting 2015

Members - can you remember the programmes that you have enjoyed during 2015? Our awards are particularly valued by the award-winners because they know that their programmes have been nominated by and voted for by us as listeners and viewers. So do take a few minutes as this year draws to a close to add your suggestions to the nomination forms that have been sent to you with this bulletin.

Please return your nominations on the enclosed forms to VLV by **Monday 8 January 2016.**

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