

## BBC Charter Review Consultation – Equity’s Response

9 March 2026

### Key demands

- A Workforce Covenant recognising that the BBC’s commissioning and operational decisions must respond to the needs of the workforce as well as audiences, and imposing a legal duty to conduct workforce impact assessments and implement mitigation measures.
- The recognition of trade unions as essential partners of the BBC in guaranteeing good jobs across the UK and rights and dignity at work, both for employees as well as freelancers.
- The integration of the BBC into the government’s industrial strategy, with the creative industries treated as an ecosystem linking local theatre, film, audio and TV production.
- A fair distribution of BBC investment across the nations and regions, starting with the Midlands, accompanied by a strategy to ensure success and a plan to track progress.
- A continuing or returning drama series that films for more than six months of the year in each of the UK’s Ofcom-defined reporting areas.
- A substantial and guaranteed level of investment in audio drama series.
- A BBC strategy to encourage different models of production, such as cooperatives or mutuals.
- The creation of Workforce Panels to assess and shape the BBC’s operations.
- Workforce representation on the Board of the BBC.
- The BBC being placed on a statutory footing.
- A funding model for the BBC that aligns with principles of universality, independence and fairness.
- Stable, ring-fenced, long-term funding and full editorial and structural independence for S4C.
- A guarantee that any reform of the BBC’s funding or governance framework will protect S4C’s statutory status, digital prominence and workforce standards.
- An enforceable commitment to abide by an ethical and rights-based approach to artificial intelligence (AI), including seeking artists’ agreement to any use of generative AI and consulting relevant unions in that regard.
- The foundation of the British Digital Cooperative, in which all BBC digital services would be underpinned by public service algorithms.

## About

Equity is the UK's largest creative industries trade union with 50,000 members united in the fight for fair terms and conditions across the performing arts and entertainment industries. Our members are actors, singers, dancers, designers, directors, models, stage managers, stunt performers, circus performers, puppeteers, comedians, voice artists, choreographers, supporting artists and variety performers. They work on stage, on TV and film sets, on the catwalk, in film studios, in recording studios, in night clubs and in circus tents.

## Response

The review of the BBC's Royal Charter is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to re-found the BBC with a renewed commitment to bold public service broadcasting. In Equity's vision of a revitalised BBC, the corporation would drive economic growth in every part of the UK, fuelling the expansion of the independent sector as well as other industries. The BBC would be the gold standard on employment rights, driving up terms and conditions for workers across the creative industries. With decent salaries, workers would be able to build lifelong careers in the performing arts and entertainment sector, whatever their background and wherever they live in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales. To achieve this vision, Equity proposes a strengthening of the BBC by three means: democratisation, regionalisation and cooperatisation.

### Democratisation

As a civic institution, the BBC should be democratic. In other words, the corporation must be accountable to the people who fund it *and* to those who create its value.

Equity calls for the BBC's democratic credentials to be radically improved, as the current structure of the corporation fails to reflect the values that should animate a public institution. At the level of governance, this requires mechanisms of genuinely independent oversight that are separate from both the management of the BBC, as well as the government of the day. This would help the BBC retain its political independence, reflect a diversity of views from across the UK, and rebuild trust with the British public. The government should insulate the BBC from future political interference by placing it on a statutory footing. We also urge the government to ensure that the creative workforce is represented at the highest level of the corporation, including via union voice.

In this regard, Equity notes its disappointment that the Green Paper refers to the Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority as being responsible for improving organisational compliance with workplace standards, and makes no mention of the trade unions with which the BBC holds collective agreements – including Equity and other members of the [Broadcasting, Entertainment and Arts Unions](#). The government must support and encourage the BBC to use existing relationships with trade unions to ensure the protection of rights and dignity at work.

The BBC's democratic credibility is bound up in the question of the licence fee. Equity believes that the current funding model is not fit for purpose – the purpose being to provide ample and stable funding to a critical foundational institution of this country. Whichever funding model is implemented in the next Charter, it must align with the principles of universality, independence and fairness. The government must also guarantee stable, ring-fenced, long-term funding and full editorial and structural independence for S4C as a public service broadcaster in its own right, sustaining Welsh-language representation and creative employment in Wales. Equity urges the government to reconsider its rejection in the Green Paper of a levy on the revenues of large streaming platforms. We oppose the Green Paper's proposals to commercialise the BBC, which would undermine the principle of universality. We also reject the proposal to sell the BBC's archive to train AI models, which fails to meet [Equity's criteria for ethical AI](#).

Equity's concerns about the democratic deficit at the core of the BBC have been heightened by the way that this Charter review has proceeded. A 12-week consultation period that includes the Christmas and half-term breaks, combined with a superficial tick-box survey exercise and no opportunity for substantive responses, demonstrates a surprising degree of contempt towards the broadcaster's principal funders and its wide and varied workforce.

### Regionalisation

As a public service broadcaster funded by people living in every nation and region of the UK, the BBC should be regionalised. By this we mean that people across the UK should see their lives, interests and concerns reflected in the BBC's content, and they should share equitably in the employment opportunities generated by the BBC.

Notwithstanding the rhetoric of the government and the BBC, this is far from the case at present. Film and television production remains heavily concentrated in London and the South East. Performers in the UK's nations and regions often struggle to find enough employment to sustain a career and many are forced to move to the capital for opportunities. The [National Audit Office's](#) 2024 report on the BBC's implementation of its "Across the UK" regionalisation programme found that the BBC was behind schedule, had not developed a clear implementation plan and lacked an adequate way to track and measure progress.

The corporation must urgently remedy this situation by investing in under-represented areas, starting with the Midlands. In this region, the scale of the longstanding disparity in investment is striking. In 2024, the [Midlands received only 3.4%](#) of the BBC's network TV programming spend, despite being home to approximately [25% of the UK's licence fee payers](#). Equity calls on regionalisation to be accelerated, with the BBC given specific responsibilities regarding sites of production in each nation and region, and obliged to develop a clear strategy to ensure success and an effective plan to track progress.

One straightforward way to sustain regional production in under-represented parts of the UK is via the production of continuing and returning TV dramas. We note our disappointment that the Green Paper failed to include these series in its definition of underserved types of content. These

series are integral to the UK production landscape in providing a training ground for cast and crew, which in turn supports the wider production ecosystem. At a minimum, Equity calls on the BBC to be required to produce a continuing or returning drama series that films for more than six months of the year in each of the UK's Ofcom-defined reporting areas.

A genuine regionalisation of the BBC would dovetail with one of Equity's longstanding demands, which is for the UK government to develop a coherent, place-based arts and entertainment industrial strategy, which treats the sector as an ecosystem linking local theatre, film, audio and TV production. Creative clusters should be developed in each region of every UK nation, around key, well-resourced national anchor institutions – such as the BBC. These can act as centres of creative production on decent terms and conditions, inform local skills pipelines to provide opportunities for the local workforce, and attract private investment.

### Cooperatisation

The BBC should be cooperatised because this structure better reflects the values that underpin the corporation as a public institution. By cooperatisation, we mean that the BBC should be reconfigured under a new structure in which it is owned and run by licence fee payers and its workforce – both those permanently employed and the thousands of freelancers that it relies on. This would not only improve the working conditions of the BBC workforce, it would also contribute towards the government's drive to [insource](#) public services and thereby reduce the inefficiencies of the BBC's de facto internal market.

Equity proposes cooperatisation at three levels. *First*, the new Charter should create Workforce Panels, which would complement the Members' Panels proposed by the [Media Reform Coalition and Common Wealth](#). These Workforce Panels, empowered to assess and shape the BBC's operations, would be composed of representatives from the BBC's permanent employees as well as its freelance workforce. *Second*, the Charter should establish a British Digital Cooperative – as suggested by [Common Wealth](#). The BBC would form the hub of a network of not-for-profit platforms and apps designed with the corporation's public purposes in mind. All BBC digital services would be underpinned by algorithms that serve public service values. The BBC could use its algorithms to help users access personalised content that would better inform, educate or entertain them. These civic priorities stand in stark contrast to commercially oriented algorithms, which are wholly driven by the profit motive. *Third*, the BBC should establish a strategy to encourage different models of production, such as cooperatives or mutuals. Structures in which power is shared more equitably are also likely to improve workplace culture outcomes.

### **Contact**

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