

BBC Charter review and Northern Ireland

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Topical Digest

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This topical digest provides a reading list about what the UK Government's BBC Charter Review means for Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly. It includes links to recent academic research papers, parliamentary and government department publications, academic journal articles, BBC and Ofcom reports and media coverage.

Front cover image: [Tim Mossholder](#) (Pexels)

1 Introduction

In December 2025, the UK Government published its [Green Paper on the BBC Royal Charter Review](#). This sets out proposals that will shape the future of public service broadcasting across the UK. It also sets out the BBC's responsibilities as a publicly funded UK cultural institution to include driving economic activity, guaranteeing democratic accountability, and promoting linguistic and regional diversity. The Green Paper raises questions about representation, funding, governance, and the BBC's evolving role in a digital age. These considerations may be relevant to ongoing scrutiny by Members within the context of Northern Ireland.

Although broadcasting is a reserved matter, a [2015 Memorandum of Understanding \(MoU\)](#) between the UK Government, the BBC, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Assembly sets out how devolved institutions in Northern Ireland are formally consulted during the BBC Charter Review process, and how the Assembly receives the [BBC's annual report and accounts](#) in parallel with the UK Parliament. Through a suggested 'take note' debate, these arrangements give Members opportunities to scrutinise governance, funding priorities, and the BBC's delivery of [regional and linguistic commitments](#) for [Irish](#) and [Ulster-Scots](#) related output, so that Northern Ireland's cultural and democratic interests are represented within UK-wide broadcasting policy.

In January 2026, [the Senedd](#) and the [Scottish Parliament](#) held inquiries into public service broadcasting and there was a [Westminster Hall debate](#) in the House of Commons. These recent parliamentary discussions have highlighted a shared set of concerns about the BBC's future. MPs in the House of Commons focused on the implications of the [Media Act 2024](#), the sustainability of the [licence fee](#), and wider governance issues, including political and staff appointments and scrutiny raised by bodies such as the [Centre for Media Monitoring](#). These debates also underscored concerns about the regional distribution of BBC output, particularly around the balance and accuracy of [local news](#) and reporting on sensitive issues. In [the Senedd](#), Members have similarly examined questions of funding, accountability, and the BBC's role in supporting Welsh cultural and linguistic output, emphasising fair representation and the importance of sustained investment in regional services. Meanwhile, discussions in [the Scottish Parliament](#) have echoed these themes, highlighting concerns about the BBC's governance arrangements, the adequacy of Scottish representation within decision-making structures, and the need for strong, well-resourced public service broadcasting that reflects Scotland's cultural, linguistic, and democratic needs.

[Ofcom's recent analyses of BBC Northern Ireland](#) provide insight on how the broadcaster is meeting its obligations. These reports highlight improvements in transparency and regional engagement but also point to persistent challenges, such as workforce diversity and the sustainability of local news provision. They show that audiences in Northern Ireland rely heavily on BBC News NI for trusted coverage, underscoring the importance of maintaining strong local journalism. At the same time, Ofcom notes gaps in gender balance and age diversity within BBC NI's workforce, raising questions about inclusivity and representation.

Complementing this regulatory perspective, [Ulster University's research on public service broadcasting](#) offers an academic assessment of the sector's health and resilience in 2025. While the study concludes that PSB in Northern Ireland remains 'fairly healthy', it warns of vulnerabilities linked to audience fragmentation and financial pressures. The report calls for renewed investment in local production, skills development, and cultural programming, including Irish and Ulster-Scots content, to ensure that public service broadcasting continues to reflect the region's identity and support its creative economy.

Together, these sources provide a range of opportunities and risks facing BBC Northern Ireland as the Charter Review unfolds. The commentary highlights issues such as quotas, governance arrangements, funding reforms and local service provision, which may form part of Members' consideration during the BBC Charter Review process.

This Topical Digest provides a range of different publications and resources to assist with scrutiny of the Charter Review process.

2 BBC

- [BBC to increase spend on content representing nations as it strengthens TV commissioning across the UK](#) (9 December 2025)
- [Charter and Agreement](#) (Accessed 16 January 2026)
- [Licence Fee and funding](#) (Accessed 16 January 2026)
- [Mission, values and public purposes](#) (Accessed 16 January 2026)
- [Delivering across the UK](#) (excerpt from Annual Report 2024/25; the full Annual Report can be found [here](#)) (Accessed 16 January 2026)
- [Purpose plan for delivering the BBC public purpose: Representing the UK, its nations, regions and communities](#) (Accessed 16 January 2026)
- [Delivering our Mission and Public Purposes: the BBC's performance in 2024/25](#) (15 July 2025)
- [Annual Report and Accounts 2024/25](#) (Accessed 10 February 2026)
- [Annual Plan 2025/26](#) (March 2025)
- [Northern Ireland economic impact](#) (November 2024)
- [Delivering quality first in Northern Ireland](#) (October 2012)
- BBC R&D/Responsible Innovation Centre reports (all published October 2025):
 - [A digital future created with young people, for young people](#)
 - [A digitally inclusive vision for public service media](#)
 - [Public Service Media and democracy in the digital age](#)
 - [BBC Response to Green Paper 2005](#) (Accessed 10 February 2026)

3 OFCOM

- [Ofcom's annual report on the BBC](#) (updated 28 November 2025)
- [Public service broadcasting annual compliance report 2025](#) (30 July 2025)
- [Media Nations: Northern Ireland 2025](#) (30 July 2025)
- [Public service media review](#) (21 July 2025)
- [Understanding what people in the UK need from public service media](#) (updated 13 March 2025)
- [The relationship between the use of PSBs for news and societal outcomes: An empirical analysis](#) (5 February 2025)

4 UK Government

- [Government launches Charter Review to future-proof the BBC](#) (16 December 2025)
- [Britain's story: the next chapter – BBC Royal Charter Review, Green Paper and public consultation](#) (16 December 2025)
- [UK Government Charter Review Collection 2025/27](#) (16 December 2025)
- [BBC Charter Review – Terms of Reference](#) (16 December 2025)

5 UK Parliament

- House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee:
 - [Written evidence submitted by the BBC Response to Inquiry into Minority Languages](#) (March 2023) (no report has been published but the Inquiry homepage can be found [here](#))
 - [Sustainability of local journalism, Seventh Report of Session 2022–23](#) (January 2023) and link to the [Government's response](#) (May 2023)
- House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee, [Public broadcasting in Scotland, Fifth Report of Session 2022–23](#) (February 2023) and link to the [Government's response](#) (April 2023)
- House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee, [Licence to change: BBC future funding, 1st Report of Session 2022-23](#) (July 2022) (responses to this report can be found [here](#))
- House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, [The future of public service broadcasting, Sixth Report of Session 2019–21](#) (March 2021) and link to the [Government's response](#) (June 2021)
- Westminster Hall debate on [BBC Charter Renewal](#) (6 January 2026)
- Commons Chamber debate on [BBC Charter Review](#) (17 December 2024)
- House of Commons Library Research Briefings:
 - [BBC Charter Renewal: a reading list](#) (19 January 2026)
 - [The future of the BBC licence fee](#) (14 January 2026)
 - [Future of local media](#) (1 December 2025) (and [link to associated debate](#))
- House of Lords Library In Focus articles:
 - [Broadcasting: Recent developments in the UK](#) (12 December 2025)
 - [Future funding of the BBC: Lords committee report](#) (7 December 2022)

6 Northern Ireland

- Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service (RaISe), [What's next for public service broadcasting in Northern Ireland?](#) (21 June 2021)
- Ulster University, [Public service broadcasting in Northern Ireland: research monitoring report – 2025](#) (April 2025) (the 2023 report can be found [here](#))
- Javnost – The Public Journal of the European Institute for Communication and Culture, [Public service media in Northern Ireland: prominence and vulnerability in a small media system](#) (May 2024)
- Northern Ireland Assembly Plenary, [BBC Royal Charter and Framework Agreement](#) (27 September 2016)
- Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service (RaISe), [What could the draft BBC Charter mean for Northern Ireland?](#) 27 September 2016
- Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service (RaISe), [The BBC Charter Renewal and its potential implications for devolved jurisdictions](#) (24 February 2015)
- Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure:
 - [Legacy Report](#) (March 2016)
 - [Minutes of Evidence - BBC Charter Renewal: Mr Peter Johnston, BBC Northern Ireland](#) (October 2015)
 - [Minutes of Evidence - BBC NI: briefing from Director](#) (November 2013)

7 Wales

Senedd Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee:

- [Session 1 Public Service Broadcasting in Wales](#) (15 January 2026)
- [Session 2 Public Service Broadcasting in Wales](#) (22 January 2026)
- [Session 3 Public Service Broadcasting in Wales](#) (29 January 2026)
- [State of play: Public Service Broadcasting in Wales](#) (March 2024) (the Plenary debate on this report can be found [here](#) and written responses to the report can be found [here](#))

Senedd Research:

- [Remote control: public service broadcasting](#) (updated 16 December 2024)

8 Scotland

Scottish Parliament Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee:

- Session 1 [Scottish Broadcasting, BBC Charter Renewal and BBC Annual Report](#)
- Session 2 [Scottish Broadcasting, STV News consultation and Scottish Broadcasting Inquiry](#)

Scottish Government:

- Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, Research Paper: [Building a New Scotland: culture in an independent Scotland](#) (February 2024)

9 Ireland

- Department of Culture, Communications and Sport, [Landing page for broadcasting and media](#) (updated October 2025)
- The Future of Media Commission, [Report of the Future of Media Commission](#) (updated July 2022)
- Decentred Media, [Lessons from the Irish Media Future Commission](#) (24 February 2025)

10 Academic research and commentary

- Ulster University, [Public service broadcasting in Northern Ireland: research monitoring report – 2025](#) (May 2025)
- Dublin City University and Ulster University, [Public Media Ireland: a new PSM organisation for a new country](#) (January 2026)
- The Politics of Place, [The BBC and the UK's nations and regions: hierarchies, rivalries and contradictions](#) Amy Genders and Andrew Spicer (22 December 2025)
- Reuters Institute/University of Oxford, [The BBC is under scrutiny. Here's what research tells about its role in the UK](#) (10 November 2025)
- International Journal of Cultural Policy, ['Are you being served?' Public service media: audience conceptions of value in UK critical media infrastructure](#) Kenny Barr (13 March 2025)
- The Political Quarterly Special Edition, [Informing, educating and entertaining for democracy; the BBC at home and abroad: what public service should look like](#) (12 April 2025)

2024). Includes articles on BBC Independence, Governance and Regulation; Benefits and Values of PSB; Funding; Regional and International Perspectives. There is one article specifically looking at BBC NI, [BBC Northern Ireland and the public service challenge: some reflections](#) Bob Collins

- IPPR Progressive Review:
 - [Three lessons for the future of public service broadcasting](#) by Precious Chatterjee-Doody & Rhys Crilley (11 May 2022)
 - [Building a vision for a People's BBC](#), Deborah Grayson (11 May 2022)

11 Interest groups

International Broadcasting Trust (IBT):

- [The battle for the BBC's future](#) (5 January 2026)
- [Behind the screen – how streaming is changing public service media](#) (22 July 2025)

Voice of the Listener and Viewer (VLV):

- [VLV briefing on BBC Charter Renewal](#) (18 December 2025); an archive of older briefings can be found [here](#)
- [VLV citizens' PSM Forum issues joint statement ahead of BBC Charter renewal](#) (11 December 2025)
- [Why public service broadcasting matters](#) (Accessed 20 January 2026)

Media Reform Coalition:

- [A people's BBC and Channel 4](#) (Accessed 20 January 2026)
- [BBC Charter review 2027](#) (Accessed 20 January 2026)
- [A blueprint for permanent decline: the DCMS Green Paper on BBC Charter review](#) (December 2025)
- [Who owns the UK media?: 2025 Report](#) (May 2025) (previous reports in this series can be found [here](#))
- [Our mutual friend: the BBC in the digital age](#) (April 2025) (co-authored with Common Wealth)
- [Manifesto for a people's media: creating a media commons](#) (January 2023)
- [Media Reform Coalition submission to Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee on the sustainability of local journalism](#) (March 2022)

Other interest groups:

- Citizens' PSM Forum, [Landing page for information about this forum](#) (Accessed 20 January 2026)
- Decentred Media, [Media reform as civic renewal](#) (18 December 2025)
- Decentred Media, [FAQ BBC Charter Renewal](#) (28 January 2026)

12 News and blog articles

- BBC News, [BBC to make shows for YouTube in landmark new deal](#) (22 January 2026)
- Belfast Telegraph, [The Irish unity dilemma almost no one has considered, but which would impact everyone](#) (17 January 2026)
- The Guardian, [BBC could soon make programmes for release first on YouTube under deal](#) (16 January 2026)
- The Irish News, [BBC and RTÉ could be scrapped in a united Ireland, report says](#) (14 January 2026)
- The Guardian, [France fears 'era of Trumpism' as public broadcaster comes under fire from right](#) (31 December 2025)
- The Observer, [Lisa Nandy: We're at a crossroads about the sort of country we want to live in](#) (20 December 2025)
- The National, [Public service broadcasting in UK isn't working for Scotland](#) (20 December 2025)
- The National, [BBC Charter review has 'troubling lack of interest' in Scottish views](#) (19 December 2025)
- The Guardian, [How might the BBC be funded if the licence fee is scrapped?](#) (16 December 2025)
- The Guardian, [BBC is losing £1bn a year in potential licence fee revenue, say MPs](#) (21 November 2025)
- Belfast Telegraph, [Public service broadcasters say ministers misunderstand consolidation meaning](#) (18 September 2025)
- The Guardian, [BBC to look at overhauling licence fee as 300,000 more households stop paying](#) (15 July 2025)
- BBC News, [BBC licence fee 'unenforceable', says culture secretary](#) (25 April 2025)
- The Guardian, [The government wants to future-proof the BBC. How about embracing a subscription model?](#) (17 January 2025)

- Slugger O'Toole:
 - [The future of public service media in Northern Ireland and beyond](#) (14 May 2025)
 - [The BBC and the Irish language](#) (3 March 2019)
- The Conversation, [BBC Scotland's new channel: a fresh start that reflects a devolved UK](#) (7 March 2019)
- Sceptical Scot, [Why the BBC must reflect devolved Britain](#) (27 October 2015)
- IPPR, [Putting the Scottish voice into BBC Scotland](#) (14 October 2015)
- Nation Cymru, [100 years of the BBC in Wales: an uneasy start and unclear future](#) (13 February 2023)

This information is provided to MLAs in support of their Assembly duties and is not intended to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual or organisation. Inclusion of a resource does not imply endorsement of any particular viewpoint. Whilst we strive to ensure that the information provided here is up to date, the information on external websites referred to may change frequently. This leaflet should not be relied upon as providing legal or professional advice, nor as a substitute for it. A suitably qualified professional should be consulted if specific advice or information is required.

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