

# Recipe for BBC confusion

AT LAST the government has published its White Paper setting out its plans for the BBC – to a chorus of relief, given that few of the kites that had been flown to scare the multitude stayed aloft. The licence fee – the worst possible way of funding a public broadcaster, except all the other ways – remains.

Positively for local news reporting, there is support for proposals for a “News Bank” syndicating “content” for local and regional news organisations; a “Data Journalism Hub” in partnership with a university; and “Local Public Sector Reporting Service” to report on local institutions. The *Freelance* presumes that all these will lead to paid work for journalists.

The news isn’t so good for authors and performers other than journalists, though. The government plans to “open to full competition the £740 million the BBC spends each year on in-house television content production (with the exception of news and news-related current affairs)”. That would mean that all non-news production was privatised – with the BBC establishing a “Studios” company to bid against the Endemols of this world. That in turn means that collectively-bargained agreements and commissioning practices that are less awful than in the rest of the industry are under

threat. And, buried fairly deep in the 136-page document, are some worrying vaguenesses about the rules under which the BBC will operate. It would be “regulated” by OFCOM, the Office of Communications. “The government will provide guidance to the regulator on content requirements and performance metrics to set clear policy parameters...” the White Paper says, maybe ominously.

The above suggests to a suspicious mind that that U-turn on the idea of demanding control over what the BBC shows and when is more of a C-turn: it can come back later, by stealth. This suspicion is reinforced by several statements resembling this: OFCOM will be responsible for “holding the BBC to account with particular regard to market impact and protecting the legitimate interests of third parties”. It would have the power to fine the BBC (though the question of where the fines would go is fudged). Given that last time we had much to do with OFCOM it was riddled with enthusiastic free-market fundamentalists, this leaves a lot of slack for those kites coming home to roost.

OFCOM will also be handling complaints not resolved by the BBC.

The White Paper proposes “opening up the BBC archive” – which rings alarm bells for performers, scriptwriters and all other con-

tributors who have not signed over rights in their work beyond its first broadcast. The document does go on to observe that “Of course there are limits to what can be achieved cost-effectively, as securing rights for that content can be complex, time-consuming and therefore costly.” We will have to keep a close eye on this.

*Variety* summed it all up in one headline: “UK’s Continued Support of BBC Leaves Rivals Disappointed”.

## And that recipe allusion...

Ah, yes: standing up the headline. Ace bit of opinion-forming by someone to float the idea that [www.bbc.co.uk/food/recipes](http://www.bbc.co.uk/food/recipes) would be taken down.

And full marks to blogger Tom Pride for pointing out that one Rupert Murdoch makes a fair dinkum whack from recipe sites in Australia, and for finding several dormant internet domain names for UK sites. Odd coincidence, that. At this time the above apparently-universally-loved site is still there.

The *Freelance* awaits developments with interest. Certainly, some enterprising person will produce a searchable index of the copies of the dearly-beloved BBC recipes held on [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org). What will happen after that? Who in fact owns the rights in the recipes?

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## Please do this survey!

The growth of freelance journalism over the last few years has been one of the most striking features of the working lives of journalists, and yet the amount of information collected on freelance journalists’ working lives is limited. So the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) is conducting research to gather the views of freelance journalists, whatever sector you work in. Any self-employed journalist who makes a living from the use of their journalistic skills is eligible to take part. The survey will take about 20 minutes to complete online and the findings are completely confidential. It would be extremely helpful if all freelance journalists could find the time to complete the survey so that the research can be as comprehensive as possible. Please do so before **26 June**.

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back to speech recognition software in the US, was hacked and turned into a room bug.

The Bill would allow the Home Secretary to serve “technical capability notices” requiring any company to install malware that works on all of their PCs, toys or phones. There would be fines for manufacturers revealing details of such notices, with directors liable to imprisonment. No customer could ever trust a UK-based software company or ISP again. Corporations like Google and Apple have responded by starting to encrypt everything end to end – they can say they have no knowledge of or responsibility for any message conveyed through their systems.

When it’s challenged about doing something illegal, the government now simply says “oh yes”. To start with, to justify phone-tapping the UK government invoked the power of the monarchy. It was the work

of journalists such as Duncan that forced the first Act of Parliament to legitimise it.

In November 2015, for example, Duncan was scooped – by Home Secretary Teresa May. She admitted in Parliament the extent of phone record retention. Her onslaught in November leaves little time for building opposition to the Bill or even for parliamentary Committees to consider it. Various dutiful committees have looked at drafts of this Bill and decided privacy was rather important. All the government did in response was to write the word “privacy” into the first section.

With “no realistic chance of defeating it (the Bill) because we have no functioning Opposition,” according to Ross, the bounds on investigatory powers are more likely to be set by judges than by members of parliament.

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• There’s a much longer version of this article online



Duncan Campbell (above) and Ross Anderson: photos © Hazel Dunlop