

6 July 2020

To: The BBC Board

c/o Phil Harrold, BBC Company Secretary

cc.

Oliver Dowden, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

Dame Melanie Dawes, Chief Executive of Ofcom

Paula Carter, Chair of Ofcom's Advisory Council for England

Press Association

Dear All,

Save BBC regional factual & current affairs programming

We are writing to the BBC Board, with a copy to Oliver Dowden – Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, Dame Melanie Dawes – Chief Executive of Ofcom and Paula Carter – Chair of Ofcom's Advisory Council for England, following the BBC's plans to decommission *Inside Out* and instead produce a series of single half-hour films for regional audiences from offices in London, Newcastle, Leeds, Birmingham, Bristol and Norwich.

We are also keen to place on record our sympathy and support for all the BBC colleagues with whom we have worked for many years and who now face the prospect of losing their jobs.

All the below signatories have worked on either *Inside Out*, *Sunday Politics* (now *politics england*) or on one or more of the numerous regional factual/current affairs half-hour programmes which have also been the 'bread and butter' of many more across the industry. Each series of *Inside Out*, for example, produces more than 200 diverse stories, which not only supplies a huge amount of content to the BBC's regions but also make valuable contributions both to national news programmes and to the Corporation's valued online content. Crucially, the series also provides work for skilled and freelance crew, such as camera operators, studio directors, producers, journalists, presenters and editors - all of whom consistently show a high level of devotion to supporting the respective regions in which they live and work.

Aside from threatening our livelihoods, we passionately believe that these changes will leave many viewers very poorly served, particularly in the South which appears to have borne the brunt of the cuts, with the production teams making weekly current affairs programmes in Plymouth, Southampton and Tunbridge Wells now being deemed 'surplus

to requirements'. As such, we are unsure how a thirty-minute programme produced in Bristol can possibly reflect the lives and interests of people living anywhere from Penzance to Gloucester. Likewise, audiences in Manchester will surely have little desire to watch a programme made in Leeds.

At a time of national crisis, and with so many issues surrounding COVID-19, Brexit, climate change and the shape of our economy and society needing to be addressed at a local and regional level, we strongly believe that the BBC needs to deepen its commitments to the regions, not reduce it. To diminish, or even lose focused regional programming, such as *Inside Out*, will undermine the very values on which the BBC is built – namely to reflect and represent the nations' and regions' diverse communities, and, in doing so, support the creative economy right across the UK. Additionally, with the BBC facing an upcoming charter renegotiation, it seems foolhardy to throw away the breadth of programmes that are genuinely unique – particularly given the fact that commercial radio and independent television have abandoned their regional commitments.

It is also unclear from the BBC's plans how these cuts will impact regional independent producers and freelance crew. Will these new half-hour programmes be made in-house? Will there be opportunities for regional production companies to pitch for these slots? Will this new strand run all year? Will the BBC be using regional crews and other freelancers to produce the content? With so much unknown it is perhaps understandable why we have so many questions.

We are also keen to find out what the BBC's plans are for the regional half-hour commissions – the 'Indie moments' – that many of us have been involved with for many years. The BBC regional commissioning has been vitally important for local production companies. Independently made half-hour programmes, such as *Civilisations Stories*, *Invented in* and *The Great Staycation*, for example, have been crucial not only in nurturing creative talent but also acting as a showcase both for our companies and the production staff we employ. In fact, viewing figures and the Appreciation Indices (AI's) clearly demonstrate we are providing audiences with high quality, thought-provoking content which is focusing on locations and communities where licence fee payers are under-represented by network coverage. At around £30k each, the content we produce also represents exceptionally good value for money, particularly as many of these shows end up being repeated before then being showcased on either BBC2 or BBC4.

We hardly need remind you that *Inside Out* has been the BBC's most popular current affairs show, with viewing figures outstripping both *Panorama* and *Newsnight*. The proposed replacement will simply be unable to cover anywhere near the number of important stories that *Inside Out* gives air-time to each series. Put simply, *real* regional programming must be able to cover regional issues from Land's End to Berwick-upon-Tweed.

To this end we support the comments made by Ofcom's Chief Executive, Dame Melanie Dawes (The Times 23rd June 2020), for **the BBC to deepen, not reduce its commitment to the regions**. Indeed, if the BBC were ultimately to heed Ofcom's advice by commissioning more content from the regions, then the current decision to halt the production of all regional programming may well erode the supplier base even further, at precisely the point when more may be required of them.

We all know the BBC faces tough decisions about which services its increasingly stretched resources must fund. Many of us have seen regional opportunities and budgets shrink in recent years, as we have constantly been asked to produce more for less. But the BBC's charter says the Corporation "should ensure that it provides output and services that meet the needs of the United Kingdom's nations, regions and communities." Therefore, we ask, in all fairness, how decimating regional production can be considered to fulfil this remit?

All the signatories urge you to recognise the importance of regional production, and instead of reducing this programming, to make the far braver decision to strengthen it, enabling us in turn to continue with our important work of both informing and entertaining all the respective English regions we are so proud to serve.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Johnstone, Producer/Camera, Wild Dog Films, South West

Mike Dilger, Wildlife Presenter

Caroline Roberts-Cherry, Saffron Cherry Productions, North West

Andrew Brown, Producer, Defacto Films, South West

Riccardo M. Alfano, Lighting Camera, London

Jim Anderson, Archive producer/Film Researcher/Producer, North West

John Anderson, Lighting Camera, North

Robin Anderson, Shooting Series Producer/Director, North West

Colin Ashby, Lighting Camera, East Midlands

Nick Baker, Wildlife Presenter

Paul Barnett, Executive Producer, Midlands.

Philip Berman, Producer, South West & South East

Peter Berry, Former Chair Royal Television Society, North West

Kirsty Bradbury, Lighting Camera, North

Steve Briers, Lighting Camera, South West

Luke Burwood, Lighting Camera, South

Dominic Callaghan, Producer/Director, North West

Mick Catmull, Producer/Director, A38 Films, South West

Ged Clarke, Producer, North West

Zoe Clough, Producer/Director, South West

Steve Codling, Lighting Camera, South

Dan Colbourne, Researcher/Producer, North

Richard Cook, Lighting Camera, Scotland
Andrea Cornes, Exec Producer, Tin Can Productions, East
Ian Cundall, Director/Exec Producer, Air TV, North
Paul Cutler, Sound Recordist, South East
Gareth Davies, Freelance Editor, North West
Leo Dickinson, Leo Dickinson Productions, South West
Jane Dodge, Reporter/Producer, Jigjog Media, East Midlands
Chris Durfy, Sound Recordist, South West
Roger Edwards, Lighting Camera, South West
Simon Edwards, Lighting Camera, Midlands
Nick Elborough, Film Editor, South
David French, Film Editor, South West
Simon Fox, Lighting Camera, London
Dan George, Lighting Camera, South
Nick Gilbey, Lighting Camera, South West
Andy Greenwood, Lighting Camera, NE & Cumbria
John Gurd, Lighting Camera/Editor, South West
Ian Harrold, Graphics/After Effects, South West
Phil Hastie, Lighting Camera, South West
Graham Hatherley, Wildlife Camera, South West
Steven Hay, Editor/Edit Producer, North West
Mat Heywood, Producer/Director, Yorkshire
Jeremy Hibbard, Creative Director, Televisionary, South West
Paul Hunt, Lighting Camera, East
Keith Jacobsen, Lighting Camera, North West
Andy Joynson, Director/Exec Producer, Air TV, North.
Carys Kaiser, Camera/Drone, North West
Michael Kheng, Drone Operator, East Midlands & North
Rob Kingsbury, Sound Recordist, South
Ashley Kirk, Camera Assistant, East Midlands
Kevin Langdon, Lighting Camera, West
Ross Marshall, Lighting Camera, North East
Miles Massey, Lighting Camera, North East
Graham Maunder, Chair Guild of Television Camera Professionals, South East
Paul Mellon, Lighting Camera, Scotland
Don McVey, Lighting Camera, London
Ian Meller, Film Editor, North West/North
John Morrissey, Cameraman, North West
Clive North, Lighting Camera, West
Rita O'Halloran, Freelance Production Manager, North West
Dan Olaiya, Reporter/Presenter, South West
Eoghan O'Reilly, Editor & Colourist, South West
Steve Paton, Lighting Camera, North East
Hazel Palmer, Lighting Camera, Scotland
Phil Putnam Spencer, Lighting Camera, North East, North
Claudia Riccio, Producer, Athena Films, South West

Matt Richards, Director/Exec Producer, Air TV, North
Graham Risdon, Lighting Camera, West
John Rosetti, Lighting Camera, South West
Sean Russell, Lighting Camera, South East
John Samuels, Lighting Camera, West
Danny Sullivan, Film Editor, South
Nic Small, Lighting Camera & Drone Op, South East
Colin Stone, Series Producer/Director, North West
Tom Sykes, Lighting Camera, South
Kieran Turner, Producer, Tin Can Productions, East
Mark Turner, Lighting Camera, South East
Helen Tonge, Exec Producer, Title Role, North West
Ray Tostevin, Creative Director, Grace Productions, West
Kieran Tynan, Lighting Camera, North West
Simon Vacher, Wildlife Camera, South West
Keith Wade, Lighting Camera, North
Claire Walding, Producer, East
Sarah Walters, Assistant Producer, North West
Paul Watson, Film Editor, North West
Simon Willis, Freelance Producer, South West
Terry Woller, Film Editor, East
Amanda Young, Film Editor, East
Jonathan Young, Lighting Camera, North

A total of 91 signatories