



**National
Council of
Women GB**

For a fair and
inclusive society

ACTION ON ACCESS TO RELIABLE NEWS

Referenced paper

NCWGB and the Voice of the Listener are concerned about the potential to disenfranchise people from access to reliable news. The suggestion that current free to air broadcast services would only be available through a paid for broadband connection would potentially mean that women would be unable to access reliable news.

So NCW and The Voice of the Listener have joined forces to urge the government to make sure that the BBC remains universally available across the UK without UK citizens having to pay for a broadband connection to access them.

We have identified five key facts about the impact of freely available broadcasting for women in particular. Please use these facts in any debates about this vital issue.

VLV - Five facts about Women and Public Service Broadcasting

1. Access for Everyone

Women are being disproportionately affected in this major cost of living crisis. Although politicised as a luxury, the universal payment of the licence fee ensures access to information & entertainment of a high standard to households managing on a very low income & ensures PSB services remain available without having to pay for a broadband connection- critical when 8m or 6% of UK households don't have internet access, rising to 14% in lower socio-economic groups & 20% of those 20% of those aged over 65¹.

2. Reliable Facts, Not Disinformation

A 2020 study showed that women over 50 were most likely to share pandemic-related stories on Twitter from websites that shared fake news². But there is also evidence that countries with strong public service broadcasting are more resilient to false conspiracy theories³. In this time of polarisation, public service broadcasters' role in ensuring that reliable information is circulated is vitally important for our safety & security.

3. A Watershed for Women's Health

There are brilliant examples of programmes which touch on previously taboo subjects, giving women a voice & improving knowledge & access to healthcare. Since Davina McCall's

¹ Figures from Enders Analysis

² <https://cssh.northeastern.edu/nulab/lazer-covid-twitter-misinformation/>

³ <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/medialse/2020/04/08/why-resilience-to-online-disinformation-varies-between-countries/>

Sex, Myths & the Menopause Ch4 documentary aired in 2021, 20,000 GPs & other healthcare professionals have signed up for further training about the menopause⁴.

4. Trusted for Children

85% of women leave full-time work within three years of having their first child & 19% leave work completely because businesses aren't offering the flexibility needed⁵

The UK has the most trusted children's TV brands in the world & we rely on it heavily to extend our working days - during Covid in April – June 2020, programme requests for CBeebies & CBBC shows went up by 81%. Back to normal - they still reach an enormous audience – across TV & iPlayer, BBC Children's combine for over 1.2bn minutes of content viewing every week. ⁶

5. A Gamechanger for Women's Sport

BBC broadcasting of the women's game has catalysed the explosion of popularity in women's football. England's Women's Euros triumph drew a record TV audience of 17.4m & in 2022 we've seen Women's Super League attendances rise by more than 200% while interest in women's football is up 12% amongst girls aged 5-16 in England ⁷

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/oct/17/menopause-britain-women-health-economy>

⁵ <https://www.thatworksforme.co.uk/guides-and-tools/careers-after-babies>

⁶ <https://www.thechildrensmediafoundation.org/public-service-media-report/articles/carrying-the-baton-bbc-childrens-education>

⁷ <https://www.mirror.co.uk/sport/football/news/womens-football-record-breaking-year-28789138>