

Government publishes response to decriminalising TV licence evasion

Press release

Today the government has published its response to the public consultation on decriminalising TV licence evasion.



- Consultation showed significant opposition to criminal sanctions
- Decriminalisation remains under consideration and will form part of 2022-27 Licence Fee discussions
- Alternative licence fee enforcement schemes continue to be explored

The consultation asked whether the government should decriminalise TV licence evasion by replacing the criminal sanction with an alternative civil enforcement scheme. It looked at how far alternative schemes would be fairer or more proportionate, their cost and the challenges of implementation.

The government remains concerned that a criminal sanction is increasingly disproportionate and unfair in a modern public service broadcasting system. However, it wants to ensure that any future changes to the TV licence sanction or enforcement scheme are not seen as an invitation to evade the TV licence requirement, nor privilege the rule-breaking minority over the rule-abiding majority.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said:

A criminal sanction for TV licence evasion in the digital media age feels outdated and wrong, and many who responded to our consultation agreed. Whilst the delivery of decriminalisation right now is problematic, we intend to keep looking at this as we negotiate the next Licence Fee settlement and push for the reforms at the BBC that the new leadership has recognised are needed.

The consultation received more than 150,000 responses from individuals, campaigners and stakeholders. Responses revealed that a significant number of

people are opposed to a criminal sanction with some highlighting the considerable stress and anxiety it can cause for individuals, particularly the most vulnerable in society, such as the elderly.

Many consultation responses noted changing the sanctions could have wide-ranging impacts for licence fee payers including significantly higher fines and costs for individuals who evade the licence fee.

Decriminalisation will be considered alongside the licence fee settlement negotiations that began in November. The negotiations will set the level of the licence free for a period of at least five years from 2022 and will provide the context within which any future decision on decriminalisation will be taken.

ENDS

Notes to editors

- The consultation opened in February and closed in April 2020.
- There were 154,478 responses to the consultation, including from 81 organisations including the BBC.
- Responses from individuals were split with 17,652 for decriminalisation and 19,199 against. From campaign groups, there were 18,869 for and 92,831 against.
- TV Licensing found 174,416 people watching TV without a licence in 2019/20.
- The TV licence evasion rate is currently between 6.5 and 7.5 per cent.
- As at 30 June 2020, there were zero people in prison for failing to pay the fine in respect of the non-payment of a TV licence in England and Wales.
- Around 91 people have been given custodial sentences for failing to pay fines in respect of the non-payment of a TV licence from 2015 to 2018 in England and Wales.

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