# Government criticised over flawed research amid fears of costly UK TV switch-off



Concerns are mounting over the UK Government's potential plans to switch off traditional television broadcasts, a move that many fear could significantly impact millions of viewers, particularly the elderly and economically disadvantaged. Recent research published by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport suggests a shift to internet-based television might be broadly welcomed; however, the methodology of the study has drawn considerable criticism. The survey, conducted by London’s Revealing Reality, involved only 100 participants, of whom just 27 were aged over 65. This is particularly concerning given that older generations overwhelmingly rely on terrestrial television for their viewing needs.

BBC Director-General Tim Davie has publicly advocated for a transition to Internet Protocol (IP) television, arguing that a move away from traditional terrestrial broadcasts could deliver substantial financial and social benefits. “We think now is the time to confirm an IP switchover in the 2030s, setting out the conditions and providing certainty to ensure success,” he stated in a recent address. However, the call for such a transition raises alarm among advocacy groups like Silver Voices, whose Director, Dennis Reed, has labelled the reported research as “ridiculously flawed.” Reed expresses fears that a lack of substantial consultation could leave untold numbers of viewers—particularly those without reliable high-speed internet—cut off from their preferred content.

The situation is intensified by a parallel government review regarding the long-term funding model for the BBC, amidst a backdrop of declining television licence fee revenues. Increased online consumption has led to a significant drop in households paying the traditional £169.50 annual fee, pressing the BBC to explore alternative funding structures. Culture Minister Lisa Nandy has emphasised the need for an honest national dialogue on the broadcaster's future, as discussions about the sustainability of public funding and the potential impacts on audiences become ever more urgent.

Research indicates that government efforts to transition away from terrestrial broadcasting without adequate planning could incur substantial costs. An independent report commissioned by the campaign group Broadcast 2040+ estimated that the transition could initially cost around £2 billion, followed by ongoing annual expenses of £900 million. This includes extensive investments required to equip homes for the digital shift, conduct consumer awareness campaigns, and extend broadband access to underserved areas. Findings from this report also highlight that approximately 59% of UK viewers do not wish to be forced into broadband-only viewing, while nearly a third cite financial barriers to accessing necessary services.

As conversations continue regarding the future of broadcast television, it remains critical for policymakers to prioritise the input of a diverse range of viewers and stakeholders. Ending traditional broadcasting could disenfranchise millions, particularly those living in rural areas or from low-income households who already face barriers to broadband access. Advocates for maintaining digital terrestrial television warn that decisions taken today could have far-reaching consequences on media consumption patterns and equitable access to information for all citizens.

With the current legislation safeguarding terrestrial broadcasts until at least 2034, the government states it will consider the needs of audiences prior to implementing any changes. However, as the shift towards online content accelerates, maintaining an adequate public service broadcasting option is crucial for ensuring that all members of society retain access to essential media resources, especially in an increasingly digital landscape.

**Reference Map**

* Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2056078/fury-plan-turn-off-television), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/0bb4f0a2-c31d-4479-b268-b84dc88fc341)
* Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2056078/fury-plan-turn-off-television), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/mediacentre/speeches/2020/tim-davie-intro-speech), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/tech/bbc-online-only-future-streaming-tim-davie-b1045903.html)
* Paragraph 3: [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-govt-plans-review-funding-bbc-long-term-2024-11-29/)
* Paragraph 4: [[4]](https://csimagazine.com/csi/dtt-so-costs-twobill.php)
* Paragraph 5: [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/0bb4f0a2-c31d-4479-b268-b84dc88fc341), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-govt-plans-review-funding-bbc-long-term-2024-11-29/)
* Paragraph 6: [[4]](https://csimagazine.com/csi/dtt-so-costs-twobill.php)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2056078/fury-plan-turn-off-television> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/0bb4f0a2-c31d-4479-b268-b84dc88fc341> - A UK government-commissioned report by Ofcom reveals that terrestrial TV in the UK is at risk due to a shift to online viewing. Broadcasters warn that declining terrestrial TV viewership makes it less cost-effective, particularly due to high distribution costs. A transition from terrestrial TV would most affect older and poorer audiences lacking high-speed internet. Ofcom proposes options to sustain TV services: a more efficient terrestrial service, a core service with main channels, or phasing out terrestrial channels by the 2030s with support for affected viewers. With broadcast licences expiring soon, the urgency to define future strategies increases. As more people watch TV online, the number of internet-only households has risen to 5.3 million, while 3.9 million still rely on traditional TV. The BBC and Channel 5 owner Paramount expressed concerns over the economic viability of continuing terrestrial broadcasts, highlighting the need to embrace internet TV to meet modern audience expectations and future needs.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-govt-plans-review-funding-bbc-long-term-2024-11-29/> - The UK government is set to review the long-term funding model for the BBC, exploring alternatives to the current TV licence fee, which generates £169.50 ($215) annually from viewing households. The increasing shift toward online content consumption has led to a decline in the number of households paying the licence fee. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport announced that the review, part of the BBC's Royal Charter renewal, aims to find a sustainable and fair public funding model. This comes as the BBC has had to make financial adjustments recently due to licence fee increases lagging behind inflation. Culture Minister Lisa Nandy emphasized the need for an honest national discussion on the broadcaster's future. The current licence fee model will remain until at least 2027, with adjustments for inflation, as the government deliberates on its future funding strategy.
4. <https://csimagazine.com/csi/dtt-so-costs-twobill.php> - Switching off traditional terrestrial TV in the UK and relying on internet delivery instead would cost the country £2 billion in the short term, plus a further £900 million per year, according to a report completed by EY and commissioned by Arqiva for the campaign group Broadcast 2040+. It suggested a switchover would cost £2.1 billion up front, consisting of £129 million spent on in-home equipment and installation support, £412 million for a consumer awareness campaign, and £1.571 billion to provide full fibre connections to unconnected households. EY’s researchers also found that almost six out of ten (59 per cent) of UK viewers do not want to be forced to use a high-speed broadband internet connection to watch TV; while almost one in three (31 per cent) say they cannot afford to pay any extra money to access broadband and TV services. Current UK licences for terrestrial broadcast TV only run until the early 2030s. The Broadcast 2040+ Coalition, members of which include the Digital Poverty Alliance and the Rural Services Network, are campaigning to persuade politicians to commit to retaining universal access to terrestrial TV.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/mediacentre/speeches/2020/tim-davie-intro-speech> - In his introductory speech as BBC Director-General, Tim Davie emphasized the importance of online services and the need for a shift towards digital platforms. He acknowledged the transition from linear to on-demand content and highlighted the necessity of a hybrid approach for the foreseeable future. Davie discussed the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital landscape, stressing the importance of maintaining the BBC's public service mission while embracing technological advancements. He also addressed the need for a radical shift in focus to ensure that the BBC remains indispensable to all audiences, emphasizing the importance of evolving to protect the organization's core values.
6. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/tech/bbc-online-only-future-streaming-tim-davie-b1045903.html> - The BBC's director general has stated that the broadcaster is planning an online-only future that will see the end of some traditional broadcast channels over the next decade. Tim Davie gave the speech at a Royal Television Society event, outlining the vision for an internet-only distribution model. He suggested that, over time, this would mean fewer linear broadcast services and a more tailored, joined-up online offer. This represents an acceleration of the BBC’s digital-first plans, which saw the announcement in May 2022 that BBC Four and CBBC are to go online-only. While these channels still broadcast in 2022, they are not expected to go fully online before 2025.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/dec/07/bbc-will-go-online-only-by-2030s-says-director-general?ref=elger> - BBC Director-General Tim Davie has stated that the BBC is committed to live broadcasting but that Britons should prepare for the closure of many standalone channels and radio stations by the 2030s. He envisions a future where there is still a lot of live linear viewing, but it is all being delivered online. Davie acknowledged the risk that the BBC could become just another online content provider in a crowded marketplace by abandoning its traditional broadcast slots on services such as Freeview or DAB radio. He emphasized the challenge of moving to digital while not losing most of the audience and burning millions of pounds unnecessarily.