



HOUSE OF LORDS

Communications
Committee



The House of Lords is an essential part of the UK Parliament. Its committees investigate public policy, proposed laws and government activity. The remit of the Communications Committee is ‘to consider the media and the creative industries’.

Background and role

Why it was set up

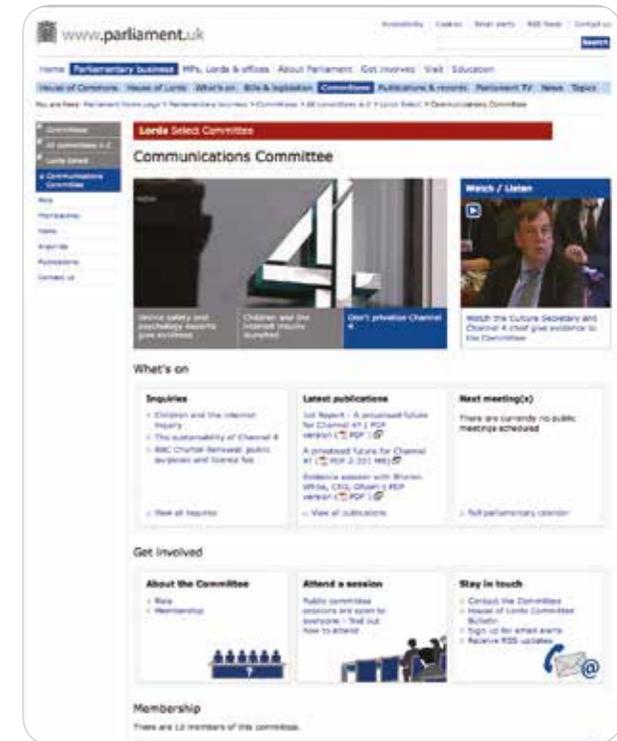
The committee was set up in 2007 to look at a broad range of communications and broadcasting issues and to highlight issues to the House of Lords. Its first chairman and many of its initial members served on a one-off committee set up in 2005 to look at the BBC Charter Review.

What it does

It investigates public policy areas related to the media, communications and creative industries.

How it does its work

The committee identifies issues relating to its remit which it considers to be worthy of investigation. It then invites stakeholders, experts and government ministers to provide evidence. Evidence can be submitted in writing or orally in a public meeting. After considering this evidence, the committee will usually publish a report which examines the main issues and makes recommendations for government and others for change.



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2007 Communications Committee set up to check on and highlight media and broadcasting issues

See all Communications Committee reports at www.parliament.uk/hlcommittees

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Membership

Members of the committee include professionals who have worked in the media and creative industries, and individuals with a range of experience in industry, politics and communications.

Members

Lord Henley (chairman)

Former Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Department for Work and Pensions) and former Minister of State (Home Office)

Lord Allen of Kensington

Chairman of the Global Group

Baroness Benjamin

Broadcaster

Baroness Bertin

Director at BT

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury

Former TV producer

Bishop of Chelmsford

Co-chairman of the BBC standing conference on ethics and beliefs

Viscount Colville of Culross

Television producer and director

Lord Finkelstein

Journalist

Lord Gilbert of Panteg

Former deputy chairman of the Conservative Party

Baroness Kidron

Film director

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall

Theatre executive

Baroness Quin

Former MP



Investigations and reports

Growing up with the internet

The Communications Committee undertook an inquiry into children's use of the internet and launched its report in March 2017. It found that the current system where online service providers are largely expected to regulate themselves is failing and that there is widespread ignorance among children and parents of how the internet works.

Evidence

The report highlights that children are adopting recently innovated technology in their everyday lives before policy makers, schools or parents can consider its implications.

The committee heard evidence that the internet does not take sufficient account of the fact that children's needs are different to adults and the current regime of self-regulation is underperforming. The committee believes that action at the highest level of the government is needed for the best interests of children online.

It heard from a range of witnesses, including parents via the Mumsnet forum and children themselves. Members visited a primary school and heard from secondary school children visiting Parliament.

Children's digital champion

Shortly before publication, the government announced that it had started work on a new Internet Safety Strategy. The committee welcomed this development, but recommended that it should include a code of conduct for internet services.

It called on the government to establish a 'children's digital champion' to ensure coordinated and sustained action across all departments and to present robust advocacy on behalf of children to industry.

Recommendations

Other recommendations included the mandatory introduction of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education in schools to promote digital literacy.

Businesses, public bodies and voluntary sector organisations operating on the internet should adhere to minimum standards for child-friendly design, content control filtering, privacy, data collection, terms and conditions of use, and report and response mechanisms.

The committee suggested that the UK should maintain legislation incorporating General Data Protection Regulation standards in respect of children.

Skills for theatre: Developing the pipeline of talent

The committee investigated routes into the theatre industry for young people and the barriers they face in its May 2017 report. It considered how the UK can nurture and develop the talent needed to maintain the success of this industry.

A leaking pipeline of talent

The committee heard that there are concerns that could lead to serious problems in the future. Witnesses identified hazards that have led to a 'leaking pipeline of talent'.



The report identified five key issues from the evidence that merited further consideration:

- The emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) could have a detrimental effect on the status of arts subjects in state schools.
- Better career advice was needed in schools to make children aware of opportunities in the theatre.
- Lack of understanding of the full range of jobs in the theatre sector, with inadequate training in technical areas like lighting, wardrobe and carpentry and administrative areas like theatre management, accountancy and fundraising.
- The under-representation of performers, directors and writers from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities, despite impressive outreach work by the sector, particularly the publicly funded theatre.
- Concerns over future funding for the theatre, particularly as a result of cuts by many local authorities.

Future of Channel 4

The committee's July 2016 report said that Channel 4's output in news, film production and diversity could be damaged by privatisation.

Background

The committee examined the broadcaster's financial sustainability as well as the implications of privatisation, in light of the government's ongoing review of the future of Channel 4 Corporation.

Part of the nation's media landscape

The committee said that Channel 4:

- is an important and much valued part of the nation's media landscape
- provides distinctive news and current affairs coverage
- contributes to cinema through Film4
- has a demonstrable commitment to on-screen diversity.

It called on the government not to take forward plans for privatisation arguing that these qualities would be jeopardized and that the risks from selling it off are greater than any benefits that may arise.



Key findings and recommendations

- Channel 4's current business model is sustainable, at least until the end of its current licence period which ends in 2024. The committee heard that 2015 had been a successful year and that any issues of economic sustainability of previous years have now been addressed.
- Channel 4's current programming for older children and young adults is unsatisfactory and greater commitment to this group should be demonstrated.
- In the event of privatisation, there was a strong likelihood of Channel 4 Corporation being bought by a foreign company.
- Were any form of Channel 4 privatisation to be taken forward, it should be subject to a full public consultation.

Next steps

After holding the issue of privatisation under consideration for a number of months, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, Karen Bradley, decided not to privatise. At the same time, she informed the committee that she would hold a consultation on the case for relocating parts of Channel 4's operations outside of London in order to increase its regional impact. Members of the committee decided to follow this in the new Parliament.

Find out more

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