



All eyes turn to Germany in BBC funding debate

Nine Lives' Cat Lewis takes a look at the much-touted German contribution system



"It's no secret that the whole of Europe is looking at the new German system and considering if it could work for them," says ZDF senior vice-president of international Frank-Dieter Freiling.

Both culture secretary John Whittingdale and BBC director general Tony Hall have expressed serious interest in Germany's broadcast contribution system, introduced in 2013, as a possible funding model to replace the BBC's licence fee. So how does it work?

"It's a universal household levy, so each German home pays a flat monthly fee, known as the Rundfunkbeitrag, of €17.50, even if they don't have a television or radio," explains Christiane Blatter, who runs ZDF's London newsroom.

Echoing the Reithian values underpinning the BBC, in 1954 German public television was given responsibility to "entertain, inform and enlighten". Most people in the country believe it's important that everyone can access public service channels and that the majority should pay for them, but not everyone has to pay the full amount.

"Those who are deaf or blind or with other serious disabilities can apply for an exemption, along with students on benefits and others on social welfare," says Blatter. "But pensioners pay the full fee."

In contrast, those over the age of 75 in the UK are entitled to a free licence fee, and the government has just told the BBC that it must meet the £650m annual cost from 2018.

Providing the elderly with free public service broadcasting seems unnecessary to Freiling. "Why should older people be exempt? They watch a lot more TV and listen to more radio than everyone else, plus they can afford to pay," she says.

Germany's broadcast contribution is deliberately not called a fee or a levy, to distinguish it from

taxes collected by local and national government.

The new system replaced the GEZ radio and TV fee, which was payable per device and relied on individuals taking the initiative to cough up. Now payment is obligatory and the money is collected by an agency independent of both the broadcasters and government.

The new system is considered a great success, with a 97% collection rate. "There was some protest when it was first introduced," says Freiling. "Particularly from second-home owners and people running businesses with numerous bases [each of which has to pay] but the opposition has died down."

'Public service broadcasting is an absolutely crucial part of a democracy'

Frank-Dieter Freiling, ZDF

The current exchange rate means the broadcast contribution cost broadly the same as the £145.50 a year BBC licence fee, but because Germany's population is nearing 83 million, it now has one of the largest public service broadcasting budgets in the world.

The money funds the two public television broadcasters, ARD and ZDF, plus Deutschland Radio. "The funding has to be adequate," says Blatter. "Because it's considered vital that people in Germany have continual access to independent and accurate news."

Freiling agrees: "Public service broadcasting is an absolutely crucial part of a democracy and plays a key role in unifying the country."

"Germany also recognises that to compete on the international stage, it needs a population that is well educated and informed by excellent public service broadcasting."

► *Cat Lewis is chief executive, joint creative director and executive producer at Nine Lives Media*

British TV must invest in talent if it wants to grow

Funding should be made available for those who cannot afford fees, says Lorna Harnett



If the British TV industry wants to continue to grow, it needs to put more funding into training. In

particular, it needs to find ways to offer training to those who cannot afford university tuition fees, or to live on unpaid internships.

Despite having worked as a researcher and assistant producer since 2009, I felt I needed additional training. I was one of the lucky few to be accepted onto the MA in Producing and Directing Television Entertainment at the National Film and Television School (NFTS). But with course fees of £21,600, I had to work three low-wage jobs while putting in 60-80 hours a week on projects.

I began applying for funding in 2012, and by the time I graduated in 2015, I had received £8,100 towards the fees I paid to the NFTS. The rest was paid for via a personal loan that I'll be repaying for years to come.

Without the funding from the CTBF, the Sidney Perry Foundation, the Sir Richard Stapley Educational Trust, and an NFTS/BBC bursary, I would not have been able to complete the course.

At the NFTS, I was able to bring several projects from page to screen, including a gameshow,

The Generation Gap, and an access documentary, *Inside IKEA*.

After graduating, I was selected to take part in a Warner Brothers development training course, and I've achieved my aim of launching a career in development, working for indie Chalkboard TV.

I'm now working on everything from gameshows to factual formats and documentaries.

Without the NFTS course, I would never have been able to produce a TV documentary, nor develop and produce/direct my

'The TV industry needs to create opportunities for a diverse range of voices'

own formats and pitch them to Sky, Channel 4 and Warner Brothers. But without the funding I received, I would never have been able to complete the course.

The TV industry needs to create opportunities for a diverse range of voices, of all ages and all backgrounds, and the only way to do this is to make funding available for practical, useful training programmes in every area of TV production.

► *Lorna Harnett is a graduate of the National Film and Television School and is working with Chalkboard TV*



Inside Ikea: access doc made by Lorna Harnett as part of the NFTS course