

THE NOTE BOOK



Where big thinkers have their say. Today, it's **Steven Barnett**, Professor of Communications at the University of Westminster

BBC bashing might be fashionable, but Auntie is a pillar of reliability

IT'S NOT a doorstep issue and barely features in either of the major party manifestos, but the new government must make a huge call in the next couple of years – deciding on the future of the BBC. The beeb is governed by a Royal Charter which expires at the end of 2026, and a decision about its future will have to be made long before that.

It has become increasingly fashionable to attack the BBC – from the right because any public intervention in the market is disliked, and from the left because the licence fee takes no account of ability to pay (apart from over 75s on pension support).

So this is a good moment to remind ourselves why the BBC matters. It is by far the most trusted source of news and information. In an age where malign actors are keen to spread disinformation to undermine democracy, the BBC is a pillar of reliability not just in the UK but for the half a billion who it

reaches around the world.

It invests in British talent, whether actors, writers, comedians or musicians, both on and off-screen. In the week of Glastonbury, let's remember that BBC Introducing – its platform for new artists – launched the careers of Ed Sheeran, Florence and the Machine, and Ellie Goulding amongst others.

American streamers like Netflix and Disney give us some wonderful entertainment. But their market is worldwide and their investment is unreliable. Today, the BBC's contribution to the UK creative economy is estimated at £5bn, supporting well over 50,000 jobs both directly and indirectly, ensuring that British stories are still told to British audiences.

Only the Liberal Democrats have promised to protect the BBC as an independent, publicly owned, public service broadcaster, of size and scale. For the country's sake, let's hope the new government reads their manifesto.

VIP VIEW... FOR SOME PERHAPS

As a dedicated Swiftie, I headed to Wembley on Saturday with my daughter clutching two ridiculously expensive tickets but looking forward to a fabulous view from row 7. Unfortunately, AXS had somehow omitted to tell me that the stage would be hidden behind their temporary VIP tents. Her performance was sensational, and the atmosphere was electric. But it would have been nice to see the stage. If you're going in August and you're in section 102 – be warned.



◉ **Much is being made of whether the Sun will back Starmer's Labour Party. But does it really matter? The speculation is great PR for the Sun but – as its former editor David Yelland has said – their decision will have virtually no impact on how its readers vote. Anyone who remembers the Sun's daily vitriolic assault on Neil Kinnock in 1992 will tell you that the Sun has already been defanged: it's the stories they run for the weeks before the election that count, not a lukewarm endorsement in the final week.**

◉ **Hosting political debates is never easy (Beth Rigby of Sky News has probably been the standout so far), but spare a thought for the CNN team in America as they prepare for Thursday night's presidential debate between Biden and Trump. The Trump camp has already branded the pair – Jake Tapper and Dana Bash – as Team Biden and will no doubt exploit their social media presence to cry foul every time Trump's microphone is switched off. The rest of us will be left wondering how on earth the US can't produce credible candidates under 75.**

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We've called this a conspiracy of silence, and that has been essentially maintained

Paul Johnson, Director of the IFS, on every party's refusal to tell difficult economic truths

A podcast to check out: The News Agents

Despite being a political junkie, I've never found political podcasts very enticing – usually too earnest and not offering much insight. But I confess to being addicted to The Newsagents. It's fun, informative, has a range of interesting guests, and the chemistry is terrific. Jon Sopel and Emily Maitlis are big losses to the BBC, but the biggest loss of all is Lewis Goodall – articulate, personable, and ridiculously knowledgeable for someone who's not yet 35. His interviews from the frontline of marginal constituencies have been a masterclass in political profiling, making up for the loss of those constituency profiles that used to feature on Newsnight. Newsnight's loss is our gain, but what a shame that the BBC couldn't hang on to them.







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