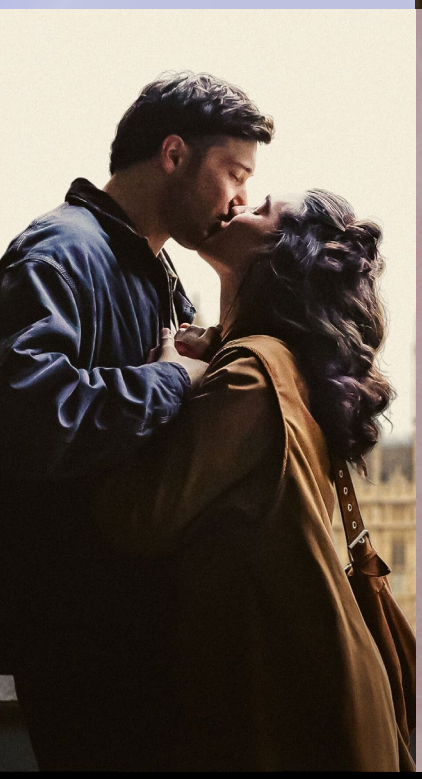






The Case for Public Service Media Prominence in the Platform Age

A statement from Channel 4 in response to the Government's Media Green Paper

Channel 4 is the UK's only publicly owned and entirely commercially funded broadcaster. We have a broad statutory remit to commission distinctive, innovative and challenging TV content that reflects the whole of the UK. This short paper summarises key elements of our response to the Government's Green Paper: Watch this space: a new strategic direction for UK media.

Summary

- Channel 4 strongly welcomes the Government's intention to secure prominence for the UK's public service media (PSM) providers[1] on the online platforms where audiences are now viewing TV content, as set out in the Watch This Space Green Paper.
- For decades, UK PSM providers have had a mission from Parliament to contribute to society and to deliver more than the market alone can provide. PSM reflects and promotes UK culture in all its diversity, supports social cohesion by bringing audiences together, and enables democratic participation through trusted news that is subject to robust independent regulation. As a commercially funded broadcaster owned by the British public, Channel 4's revenues are cycled back into content investment – fuelling the UK creative economy.
- To support their public service mission, PSM providers receive prominence on traditional TV platforms – appearing at the top of the channel guide, for example. But viewing is rapidly shifting online to video sharing platforms such as YouTube and TikTok, where what people watch is shaped by commercial algorithms optimised for audience attention – not the public service principles that have always underpinned television in the UK.
- PSM's vital societal role depends on audiences being able to find and watch PSM content. The long-standing principle of PSM prominence must be extended to major third party online video platforms.
- Regulation must secure three key outcomes for PSM providers: **1) improved discoverability**; **2) greater transparency of viewing data**; and **3) fair and sustainable commercial terms**. Like the existing prominence rules, these new protections should apply to the full range of PSM providers' content output across genres, reflecting the full breadth of our public service remits.
- Prominence is not about telling people what to watch or overriding personalisation. It would simply ensure audiences have an opportunity to discover trusted, culturally relevant and UK-representative content that they otherwise may not encounter at all. Nor is prominence a zero-sum choice between PSM providers and digital creators. PSM and creators play complementary roles in our creative economy, and supporting the sustainability of PSM content investment creates opportunities for both UK creators and the independent production sector alike.

[1] *The UK's PSM providers are the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5, STV and S4C.*

Existing prominence rules are no longer enough to support PSM in the online world

The principle of prominence is long-established and integral to the impact and viability of PSM. Prominence ensures audiences can easily access and view PSM content. It also has a commercial value that enables commercially funded PSM providers to invest in content that a purely commercial market would not deliver, such as news and current affairs. Existing prominence rules ensure PSM channels are at the top of the TV programme guide, and new rules established under the Media Act 2024 will extend this principle to smart TVs. Regulation is also in place to prevent TV platforms from taking a proportion of commercial PSM provider advertising revenue in return for carriage.

However, fundamental changes in technology and audience behaviour mean that existing legislation is no longer adequate. Third-party video platforms – in particular, YouTube – have evolved from supplementary online services into mainstream TV distributors. Among 16–24-year-olds, video sharing platforms now account for 28% of all in-home viewing, while viewing of YouTube on TV sets has increased by 111% since 2022.[2]

Channel 4 has led the way in using third-party video platforms to reach audiences online. We have invested in digital-first services including Channel 4 News, UNTOLD (digital-first current affairs strand) and Channel 4.0, our digital-first brand using creator-led content to reach younger audiences. Channel 4 content is a beacon of trust for the audiences who see it: in 2025, a record 91% of Channel 4 News viewers agreed that they trust it to report news accurately and fairly – the highest-ever level recorded since measurement began in 2016.[3]

But although our content is available, it can be difficult to discover. What audiences see on these platforms is dictated by opaque recommendation algorithms that are optimised for maximising audience attention, moving content that is more addictive, sensationalist or provocative to the top of the feed. In these environments, trusted and culturally relevant content from Channel 4 and other UK PSM providers is just a drop in a vast ocean of unregulated global video content.

This is a significant problem for UK society and our national culture. The value that PSM delivers for the UK, and the success of its public service mission, depends on audiences encountering and watching PSM content. The Government's Green Paper recognises that ensuring universal access to PSM is essential, and that action is needed to secure its prominence in a "content-saturated ecosystem".[4]

Equally importantly, the commercial terms imposed by online video platforms are not compatible with sustainable investment in high-quality TV production. Under its partner programme, YouTube retains nearly half (45%) of revenue earned by the long-form videos hosted on the platform. While Channel 4 and some other UK providers also have deals that allow us to directly sell advertising around our YouTube content, this still results in YouTube taking a substantial share of advertising value. Other major video platforms offer even poorer revenue opportunities. Platforms also give PSM providers only limited access to the viewing data we need to understand how we're reaching audiences and delivering our public service remits effectively.



[2] *Ofcom's Media Nations Report*

[3] *Ipsos / Channel 4 Annual Report 2025*

[4] *DCMS, June 2026. Watch This Space: A new strategic direction for UK Media, p.47.*



"Greater PSM prominence can be delivered without disadvantaging the UK's digital creators."

Prominence for UK PSM providers does not mean forcing audiences to watch the same things; nor will it disadvantage the UK's digital creators

PSM prominence has been characterised by some as an attempt to force all audiences to see the same content in their feeds. But this caricature does not remotely resemble what we are proposing. It is already the case that platforms manage their recommendation algorithms – down-weighting potentially harmful content, and in YouTube's case upweighting authoritative news and higher quality children's content. We believe it is possible to establish a form of enhanced discoverability for PSM that builds on platforms' existing approaches to managing their algorithms, to increase the visibility and discoverability of relevant UK PSM videos, without compromising on personalisation.

Greater PSM prominence can be delivered without disadvantaging the UK's digital creators. Ofcom has found that UK YouTube users spend only around 20% of their time on the platform watching UK-originated content, suggesting that there is significant scope to increase the visibility of PSM content alongside UK creators.[5] But this is not a zero-sum game: PSM providers and creators increasingly share talent, formats and audiences. PSM prominence has the potential to strengthen the wider creator ecosystem by bringing new audiences to platforms, attracting additional advertising investment and creating further opportunities for collaboration between PSM providers and creators. Channel 4.0 worked with more than 80 creators in 2025, helping connect digital talent with TV commissioning.

We call on Government to legislate to support discoverability, fair commercial terms and access to data for PSM providers on major third-party video platforms

Voluntary commercial agreements cannot form a reliable basis to secure the future role of PSM as critical media infrastructure. Channel 4 believes a new regulatory framework will be required to secure the three essential outcomes below, to enable PSM providers to fulfil their societal mission and to secure a more sustainable basis for continued investment in distinctive UK content.

Fair commercial terms and access to viewing data are just as vital as improving discoverability: the terms currently imposed by platforms do not provide a sustainable basis for investment in high-quality, trusted PSM content. This creates risks for the future of the UK's television production sector, which depends heavily on PSM content investment.

[5] *Ofcom 2025. Transmission Critical: The Future of PSM Report, p.16.*

Crucially, the framework should apply to the full breadth of PSM content, rather than being limited to specific genres such as news. PSM providers are accountable to Ofcom and operate under a statutory public service remit to serve all audiences with culturally valuable content that informs, educates, entertains and reflects life across the UK. A piecemeal approach will lead to a diminution of the broad social impact of PSM and the critical role of PSM providers at the heart of the creative economy across the UK.

"Effective prominence would work alongside the signals used by recommendation algorithms. It would not override audience preferences or require all users to see the same content."

1. **Improved discoverability:**
    - Recommendation systems should preference content from each PSM provider in a way that is independently measurable, and still offers audiences a highly personalised and compelling viewing experience.
    - Platforms already actively manage their recommendation systems – including YouTube, which promotes authoritative content and down-weights potentially harmful material.
    - PSM prominence should similarly increase the likelihood of PSM content being surfaced where relevant, without overriding personal preferences, and with success measured through transparent and independently verifiable viewing outcomes.
    - Effective prominence would work alongside the signals used by recommendation algorithms. It would not override audience preferences or require all users to see the same content.
2. **Greater data transparency** – PSM providers require access to timely and comprehensive audience data to understand how their content performs across platforms, optimise commissioning decisions and demonstrate delivery of their public service remit.
3. **Fair and sustainable commercial terms** – As platforms increasingly become major destinations for premium video, commercial arrangements should fairly reflect the value that PSM providers bring through high-quality UK content and support continued investment in British programming.

Prominence for UK PSM is the most effective way to improve access to trusted news online

The Green Paper's proposals for PSM prominence are separate from its proposals regarding prominence for "trustworthy" news content on social media.

Access to trusted news online is a major societal challenge, but there are significant questions about how "trustworthy" news providers could be identified and held accountable. We believe that establishing prominence and protected commercial terms for the UK's existing PSM providers would be the single most effective intervention to increase access to trusted news online and help secure its sustainable funding.



Channel 4 News