Old Grey Matter article for Saturday 2nd March EADT

Time to save the over 75's Free TV Licence

The National Pensioners Convention, (NPC), has called on the government to take back responsibility for funding the concessionary TV licence for the over 75s, ahead of a protest in March. Details are in February's Campaign bulletin found on the web at [www.npcuk.org](http://www.npcuk.org/) The call comes as part of the NPC’s response to the BBC’s consultation on the future of the concession. Meanwhile however, the broadcaster has made it clear that it does not wish to maintain the current arrangement, and is looking at raising the age of eligibility, introducing a means-test or removing the concession altogether.

When the free TV licence was introduced, it was part of a package of measures brought in to offset the UK’s low level of state pension. Today, the state pension is still ranked as 37th out of 37 OECD countries and very little has changed:

\* Half of all individuals 75 and over are disabled and find it difficult to be active

\* 1 in 4 say the TV is their only companion

\* 18% of all individuals 75 and over live in poverty, compared to 11% of the population as a whole, and the figure is now rising

\* At least half of all pensioners have an income of less than £12,000 a year, with millions more receiving incomes of just above that level

\* There are around three times as many single, older women as men, and they would be disproportionately affected by any change.

It is estimated that losing part (or all) of this concession will mean a further 50,000 individuals being forced into poverty. In any democracy, access to information is crucial to enable citizens the opportunity to be informed and make decisions. Means-testing by age or income is also totally unacceptable being a bureaucratic cost nightmare so how could the BBC afford that process?

Crucially, the BBC should take a critical look at itself before it makes a decision that affects the most vulnerable of the older population. It needs to look at the salaries paid to some of its top employees and on-screen talent and the way in which the Corporation pays independent production companies. Central government needs to take back its responsibility. Supporters are urged to join the protest so maybe some can join us there!

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