

Leaders across the United Kingdom, creatives and businesses join forces in opposition against privatisation of Channel 4

In an open letter, Mayor of West Yorkshire, Tracy Brabin, Sir Roger Marsh OBE DL, and other high-profile people from across the United Kingdom's regions and nations, have expressed dismay at the Government's plans to sell the publicly owned broadcaster Channel 4 to a private company.

Dear Ms Dorries, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport,

As leaders, creatives and businesses across the United Kingdom, we are dismayed to hear that you have decided to move forward with plans to sell Channel 4. The current remit of Channel 4 means a commitment to things that matter most to people who often don't have a voice. The channel celebrates and embraces being different and champions diversity behind the screen, on our screens and among its viewers.

The unique public service model guarantees a meaningful commitment to talent, people and ideas in places like West Yorkshire and beyond. From Bristol to Bradford, Leeds to Lincoln, Glasgow to Gwynedd: Channel 4's remit ensures that the programming reflects the lives of people across the vibrant and diverse Britain that we are all proud to call home. Its innovative Nations and Regions strategy, with 50% of commissioning outside of London and the South East and hubs in cities across the length and breadth of the United Kingdom, shows us just that.

Channel 4's decision to bring its headquarters to Leeds followed a competitive process and recognised the qualities the region offered. The opening of the headquarters in The Majestic created 200 jobs and brought a wealth of investment, including The Hub in Bradford. But it also ignited a spark that went beyond the West Yorkshire borders. With the BBC's Media City on the doorstep in Salford, the new headquarters signaled the beginning of a real Northern powerhouse in the cultural industries. Across the North, there was an excitement, with the next generation at the very forefront of our minds – a publicly owned Channel 4 bringing skills and training opportunities, apprenticeships and a genuine offer to harbour independent talent. We saw some of the UK's largest independent producers setting up in the region or expanding their presence, alongside new production and studio facilities, plus significant financial support from the public sector. Is this not levelling up in action?

Equally worrying is that selling off Channel 4 threatens jobs. In September 2021, an independent analysis by Ernst and Young LPP stated that the creative sector could be £2 billion worse off if the broadcaster was privatised, with 2,400 jobs in the creative industries at risk, with at least 60 production companies at risk of closure. At a time where we face a cost-of-living crisis, the likes of which many of us have never experienced, risking people's livelihoods in this way is reckless and illogical.

The economic argument for privatisation just doesn't stand up. You have stated that "a change of ownership will give Channel 4 the tools and freedom to flourish and thrive", protecting its future model. But Channel 4 is already flourishing and thriving. It has a highly robust financial position for a not-for-profit organisation, and last reported an annual surplus of £74 million. It's an engine for economic growth, creating an

ecosystem of new businesses, creating jobs, boosting skills and stimulating growth for us all. Privatisation is a solution, where there's no problem.

A publicly owned Channel 4 also puts diversity and difference above profit. It takes risks, tackling major issues that have the power to spark national conversations. Think of Russell T Davies' BAFTA nominated drama *It's A Sin*, or the channel's #BlackToFront project, which brought the issues of Black under-representation to the very forefront of our screens, and its longstanding support of the Paralympics. It's these broadcasting decisions that break the mould, giving a voice to marginalised communities and pushing boundaries. There's no guarantee that a global giant would protect these values and the remit that make Channel 4 so precious to us.

And the broadcaster moves with the times. It was one of the first broadcasters to move into streaming, with its All4 platform launching back in 2006 - before Netflix. It has an enviable youth reach, with an 16-34 audience profile twice that of BBC1 and BBC2 and four in five 16-34 year-olds signed up to All4.

It is a matter of public record that the big streaming services see public sector broadcasting, and Channel 4 in particular, not as a challenger, but as a necessary part of the whole ecosystem and a seedbed for talent.

Channel 4 is a service made for us, but at no cost to us. It's the jewel in our crown and something that we are rightly, very proud of.

Your decision to privatise threatens the Channel 4 we know and love, its commitment to nations and regions and the UK's unique, diverse and extraordinary creative sectors and independents.

We would strongly urge you to reconsider this extraordinary and confusing decision.

Yours Sincerely,

Tracy Brabin, Mayor of West Yorkshire

Sir Roger Marsh OBE DL, Chair of the Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership and NP11 Group of Northern LEPs

Signed by

Andy Burnham

Mayor of Greater Manchester

Dan Jarvis

Mayor of South Yorkshire

Dan Norris

West of England Metro Mayor

Jamie Driscoll

North of Tyne Mayor

Dr Nik Johnson

Mayor of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough

Sadiq Khan

Mayor of London

Steve Rotheram

Metro Mayor of the Liverpool City Region

Cllr Bev Craig

Leader of Manchester City Council

Cllr Denise Jeffery

Leader of Wakefield Council

Cllr James Lewis

Leader of Leeds City Council

Cllr Shabir Pandor

Leader of Kirklees Council

Cllr Susan Aitken

Leader of Glasgow City Council

Cllr Tim Swift M

Leader of Calderdale MBC

Cllr Andy D'Agorne

Deputy Leader of the Council, City of York Council

Cllr Nigel Ayre

Executive Member for Finance and Performance, City of York Council

Alan Lane BEM

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Alison Hobbs

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Andrew K B Warburton

Managing Director, Area Rugs & Carpets Ltd

Andrew Sheldon

Founder True North

Ben Hepworth

Managing Director Versa Leeds Studios

Bolu Fagborun

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Caroline Cooper Charles
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Chris Squire
Creative Director Impossible Arts

Christopher Swann
Writer, TV Director & Producer

Prof Damian Murphy
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David Allison
Regional Representative for Yorkshire Writers Guild of Great Britain

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Prof David Wilson
Director, Bradford UNESCO City of Film

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Cultural lead for Sowerby Bridge High Street Heritage Action Zone

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Helen Featherstone

Deputy Director Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Helen Meller

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Jamie Sefton

Managing Director, Game Republic

Jenny Layfield

Museum Director National Coal Mining Museum

Jess Fowle

Creative Director True North

Jessica Brown Meek

Founder, Duck Soup Films

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Founder, Impact Hub Bradford CIC

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Executive Director Northern Broadsides Theatre Company

Kevin Rivett

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Lucy Smith

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Nicola Greenan

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