



Information Policy and Compliance
bbc.co.uk/foi

By email to v

5 December 2007

Dear

Freedom of information request – RFI2007000972

Thank you for your request by e mail under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (“the Act”) dated 8 November 2007, seeking the following information about TV Licensing:-

“i have a few question regarding TV license holdings and evasion of the last five years with particular interest in Edinburgh.

1) can you please provide me with the number of evaders in the various cities of scotland or if you cannot the number of evaders in Edinburgh and the different areas of edinburgh

2) Can you please provide me with the percentage of license evaders in the main cities of the UK; Edinburgh, London, Manchester, Dublin and any more if you have them and how they compare?

3) similarly can you please provide me with the numbers and percentages of license holders in the different cities of the uk and how they compare to each other.

4) can you please provide me with the number of student evaders in Edinburgh city and how they have increased or decreased over the past five years.

5) finally can you please provide me with past excuses you have had to deal with TV license evaders.”

Please note that “TV Licensing” is a trading name used by companies contracted by the BBC to administer the collection of television licence fees and enforcement of the television licensing system. The majority of the administration of TV Licensing is contracted to Capita Business Services Ltd (which undertakes the majority of the administration of the TV Licensing system), with the administration of our cash related payment schemes contracted to Revenues Management Services Ltd (RMS). PayPoint Network Ltd and PayPoint Collections Ltd are contracted to provide over-the-counter services. The marketing and public relations activities are contracted to the AMV Consortium. The consortium is made up of the following four companies: Abbott Mead Vickers BBDO Ltd, Fishburn Hedges Boys Williams Limited, PHD Media Limited and Proximity London Ltd. The BBC is a public authority in respect of its television licensing functions and retains overall responsibility.

Turning to your specific questions, please find our responses below.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

1) can you please provide me with the number of evaders in the various cities of scotland or if you cannot the number of evaders in Edinburgh and the different areas of edinburgh

I should explain that I am unable to provide exact figures for how many people are evading the licence fee at any given time or place, since this is a statistic that cannot be known. So I have instead provided you with the number of evaders caught in the calendar year 2006 for the major cities in Scotland:-

Aberdeen = 3,323

Dundee = 2,027

Edinburgh = 6,207

Glasgow = 20,390

The official estimated evasion rate for the United Kingdom as a whole was 4.7% at March 2006 and 5.1% at March 2007. The estimated evasion rate is reported each year in the BBC's Annual Report.

Although it is possible to provide information concerning the number of evaders caught in the different areas of Edinburgh, as per your request above please note that I am withholding such statistics under section 31 (1) (a) of the Freedom of Information Act, which relates to law enforcement, specifically that disclosure would, or would be likely to, prevent the prevention or detection of crime. I have explained the reasons for this below in the section on '*Why information has been withheld*' below.

2) Can you please provide me with the percentage of license evaders in the main cities of the UK; Edinburgh, London, Manchester, Dublin and any more if you have them and how they compare?

Although it is possible to provide information concerning the percentage of licence fee evaders in the main cities of the UK, as per your request above please note that I am withholding such statistics under section 31 (1) (a) of the Freedom of Information Act. I have explained the reasons for this below in the section on '*Why information has been withheld*' below.

The official estimated evasion rate for the United Kingdom is calculated for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) using an official model. The model compares the number of licences in force to external statistics on the number of households and other licensable places. This cannot be broken down to a lower level (i.e. to any level smaller than UK country level) due to the non-availability of external statistics required (e.g. the non-availability of TV penetration statistics in smaller areas etc).

To further break down the evasion rates a different model is used which we call 'crude evasion' to reflect its imprecise nature. This takes into account the number of licences in force against the number of households, which is useful for putting the number of licences in force into context.

The crude evasion rate is calculated using the estimated number of unlicensed sites as a percentage of the 'licensable universe', where the licensable universe is the total number of sites, adjusted by an estimate of those that are unoccupied on the TV

licensing database. Please note this is an unreliable measure of evasion for the following reasons:

- i. the licensable universe (i.e. the number of potentially licensable addresses) is based on assumptions from our own database, as opposed to external statistics;
- ii. the level of unoccupied sites can change seasonally and therefore affect the evasion rate without any fundamental shift in TV Licensing's operation; and
- iii. it is not possible to build in differing television penetration rates for different types of sites (e.g. businesses compared to domestic households).

The crude evasion rates at March 2006 were:

England 4.3%
 Scotland 5.4%
 N Ireland 11.1%
 Wales 4.3%

I can also provide the total number of evaders who were caught across the UK and broken down by nation during 2006. These figures were:

England 278,152
 Scotland 75,086
 N Ireland 19,476
 Wales 20,461
 Total 393175

The total number of evaders caught in 2006 in major UK cities is shown below in a "Top Ten" league table:

Position	Location	Evaders caught, January – December 2006	Last year's League position
1	London	55,287	1
2	Glasgow	20,390	2
3	Birmingham	10,743	4
4	Manchester	9,130	3
5	Liverpool	7,634	5

6	Edinburgh	6,204	6
7	Belfast	5,805	10
8	Hull	5,360	13
9	Nottingham	5,178	8
10	Bristol	4,602	7

3) similarly can you please provide me with the numbers and percentages of license holders in the different cities of the uk and how they compare to each other.

Although it is possible to provide information concerning question 3 above, please note that I am withholding such statistics under section 31 (1) (a) of the Freedom of Information Act. I have explained the reasons for this below in the section on 'Why information has been withheld'.

4) can you please provide me with the number of student evaders in Edinburgh city and how they have increased or decreased over the past five years.

We do not hold exact information about total numbers of student evaders. If student do not live in halls of residence, then we have no way of knowing which addresses off campus are occupied by students. We therefore do not hold the information requested.

5) finally can you please provide me with past excuses you have had to deal with TV license evaders.

Please find attached as a separate document a press release which details some of the excuses received for not paying a TV Licence.

Why information has been withheld

In relation to your questions, we do not reveal more localised figures regarding the crude evasion rate as, if we were to disclose a more detailed breakdown, it could disclose trends. The knowledge of these trends would prejudice our ability to prevent evasion of the TV licence payment (for example, where there is a higher rate of evasion in a local area, someone may be less likely to purchase a licence on the basis of their assumptions on the risk of being caught). Thus we are withholding the information you requested under section 31 (1)(a) of the Act.

It is a criminal offence to install and use television-receiving equipment to watch or record television programme services without a valid licence. TV Licensing investigates and prosecutes such unlicensed use of television receiving equipment.

I am required under s 2(2) of the Act to assess whether the public interest in maintaining the exemption outlined in the sections above outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

The following factors are in favour of disclosure:

1. ensuring that public funds are being appropriately applied, that is:
 - a. ensuring that the TV Licensing system is being efficiently run; and
 - b. ensuring that value for money is being obtained.

I consider that the above public interest factors in favour of disclosure are served by the following:

1. The BBC has a duty to enforce the television licensing system and it is essential that effective deterrents against evasion are maintained for this purpose. Without an effective deterrent, evasion would invariably increase. This would be to the detriment of the honest majority of people who are properly licensed and to the overall amount of revenue available to the BBC.
2. The BBC is required to satisfy the National Audit Office ('NAO') as to the value for money of the collection and enforcement arrangements and is accountable for the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of such arrangements. NAO's most recent audit is published at http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/06-07/0607183.pdf.
3. The BBC has reduced the cost of collection from 6.2% of the total licence fee collected in 1991/2, when it took over from the Home Office, to 5% for the financial year 05/06. This demonstrates that the TV Licensing system is being efficiently run. This and further related information is available in the BBC's annual report (see www.bbc.co.uk), the TV Licensing Annual Review and the *About TV Licensing* document (see <http://www.tvlicensing.co.uk/aboutus/index.jsp>). A key part of this success has been the use of detection as a significant deterrent element.

In this instance, the public interest is served by maintaining an effective deterrent to licence fee evasion and thus in turn protecting the BBC's revenue stream.

There is hence a greater public interest in ensuring the effective collection of the licence fee than in disclosing the information you have sought. I am therefore satisfied, in terms of section 2 of the Act, that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest (outlined above) in disclosing the information.

Appeal rights

If you are not satisfied with this response you have the right to an internal review by a BBC senior manager or legal adviser. Please contact us at the address provided, explaining what you would like us to review and including your reference number. If you are not satisfied with the internal review, you can appeal to the Information Commissioner. The contact details are: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF, telephone 01625 545 700 or see <http://www.ico.gov.uk/>

I hope this response is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Natalie Saunderson

Policy Adviser

BBC TV Licensing Management Team

Blame it on the in laws!
TV Licensing reveals the worst excuses of 2007

TV Licensing has today revealed the worst excuses given in 2007 for not having a TV licence and it isn't good news for those closest to you. They say that families should stick together but when it comes to passing the buck, TV licence fee evaders aren't afraid to drop their own families in it.

The top excuses given to TV Licensing's enquiry officers by licence fee evaders included:

- **Blaming the wife's beauty regime:** "My wife has her hair done twice a week and so we find it difficult to pay";
- **Domestic arguments:** "You'll have to excuse me but I can't think straight. My girlfriend has hit me on the head with a hammer, and I thoroughly deserved it"
- **Bringing the children into it:** "I couldn't make my last payment as my baby was sick on my shoulder and I didn't want to go to the shop smelling of sick - because the guy I fancy works there!"

While families got the brunt of the blame, one person called on a higher being in an attempt to get out of the payment - "I don't need a licence, I only watch religious programmes and God provides them for free."

Despite the innovative and often spurious excuses given by licence fee evaders, our team of evader catching experts caught over 250,000 people across the UK watching TV without a licence in the first seven months of 2007.

Kate Fisher, TV Licensing spokesperson said: "These excuses may be inventive but they don't fool our team of enquiry officers. Putting the blame on someone else isn't a way to avoid paying the licence fee which could mean you risk a trip to court and a trip of up to £1,000 - and you will still need to buy a TV licence if you need one. A colour TV licence currently costs £135.50.

"Any household that watches or records television programmes as they are being shown requires a TV licence, regardless of the programmes they watch. Using our database of over 29 million addresses, we can identify at the touch of a button which addresses are unlicensed. With the help of our new handheld detectors, the message to the minority who do try to avoid paying is clear - if you are watching TV without a licence, expect a knock on the door."

"The best advice for licence fee evaders is to spend time checking out the many different ways to pay for a licence rather than creating an unbelievable excuse. You can contact us twenty-four hours a day, either on our website, www.tvlicensing.co.uk, or by phoning us on 0870 241 5590."

-Ends-

For further information/excuses, please contact the TV Licensing Press Office on 020 7544 3144.

Notes to Editors

Top ten

- **"My wife has her hair done twice a week and so we find it difficult to pay"**
- **"You'll have to excuse me but I can't think straight, my girlfriend has hit me on the head with a hammer, but I thoroughly deserved it"**
- **"My granny's 77, she doesn't live here but can I get her free licence as she hasn't got a TV?"**
- **"I couldn't make my last payment as my baby was sick on my shoulder and I didn't want to go to the shop smelling of sick because the guy I fancy works there"**
- **"I haven't renewed my licence because my wife flushed it down the toilet, along with my wallet"**
- **"I can't use my [savings] card because my husband's a chef and I have used it to scrub the pans. Plastic cards are the best things for getting dirty pans clean"**
- **"Only the children watch the TV, do you get a child discount?"**
- **"I haven't renewed my licence because I don't have time to watch TV. I'm too busy having vigorous sex with my wife."**
- **"That's not a TV, that's an ornament; my mother gave it to me." "What's that showing on the ornament?" "EastEnders"**
- **"My husband has just spent £3000 on this massive panoramic flat digital TV so we can't possibly afford a TV licence, sorry."**

Paying for a TV licence:

A colour TV licence currently costs £135.50. A black and white TV licence currently costs £45.50.

TV Licensing aims to make it as easy as possible for people to buy a TV licence, which is why there are many different ways to pay.

- **Over-the-counter** – people can now pay at any of around 17,000 PayPoint outlets across the country
- **Direct Debit** - monthly, quarterly or annual Direct Debit payment schemes are available to licence fee payers
- **Online** – people are now able to pay online at www.tvlicensing.co.uk with a debit or credit card
- **Debit or credit card over the phone** - this facility accepts payment from a range of debit cards including Maestro, Delta and Connect
- **By Post** – send a cheque made payable to TV Licensing to: TV Licensing, Freepost, BS6689, Bristol, BS1 3YJ

For more information about any of our payment options and concessions, to set up Direct Debit payments or to pay over the phone by debit or credit card please call **0870 241 5590**

TV Licensing's Annual Review is available on the TV Licensing website.