The government has ceased funding over 75’s TV Licences. Since August 2020 the BBC is now charging over 75’s for their licence.

Unite Retired Members and Unite Community stand with the over 75s.

A TV licence is not a luxury, but for many is a lifeline, a source of information and connection to the wider world (many over 75s do not have access to the internet at home), and a defence against loneliness.

To impose this fee at the time of pandemic and imposed isolation is particularly cruel.

The UK has one of the lowest pensions compared to other European Countries and making the over 75s pay for their TV licence will further plunge pensioners into greater poverty.
Pension Credit claimants are still entitled to a free TV licence – but pension credit take-up is woefully low, with 2 out of 5 eligible claimants not getting what they are entitled to.

Why not lobby your council to run a Pension Credit take-up campaign. As a result of work by Unite Community Leeds & Wakefield, Wakefield Council is now running a pension credit take-up campaign. Write to your local councillor and ask them to submit the model motion here.

A campaign like this can make a real, practical difference to the lives of our members and others. It also helps us raise the profile of our campaign. And because it is a Unite campaign, we can keep it political, and make sure that the focus is on the government not the BBC. We’re talking about justice, not charity!

Model motion for your Local Council

**Aim: To increase Pension Credit take-up**

This council notes:

- 1.3 million pensioner households are missing out on pension credit they are entitled to.
- £3 billion is returned to the treasury because pensioners do not claim the Pension Credit they are entitled to.
- Pension Credits are a lifesaver for the least well-off pensioners and provide vital help with council tax and dental bills
- Pensioners claiming Pension Credit they are also exempt from paying their TV licence.
- The government has ceased funding over 75’s TV Licences. Since August 2020 the BBC is now charging over 75’s for their licence.
- For over a million of the oldest people in our country, television is their main form of company.
- This change will harm millions of older people who rely on their TV and the most vulnerable will be forced to cut back on essentials to make ends meet, or lose out on TV altogether.
- Removing older people's access to TV would be an unthinkably cruel blow when many are already facing huge challenges.
- Half of all over 75s are living with a disability, and many rely on their TV for companionship and entertainment and for those who don't have the internet, TV lets them stay up to date with what's happening in the world.
- Loneliness is already a problem in the UK – new figures show two thirds of people rely on the TV for company in lieu of real social interactions.
- Removing the free TV licence for Over 75s in the middle of a pandemic is particularly cruel. Many older people have been left isolated and frightened by lockdown and it is vital that they have access to the news and public health announcements

This council resolves to:

- Start a local public information campaign targeting retired residents of this council to encourage them to claim Pension Credit.
CAMPAIGN ACTIONS

Keep up the pressure on Tory MPs

We need to keep the pressure squarely on the Tory government who callously and consciously ditched responsibility for funding this service onto the BBC.

If we are going to defend the BBC as a public service, we need to make sure that we direct our campaign at the right target. This government finds money for everything but the poor – whether it’s kids going hungry in the school holidays, or isolated older citizens.

Members: write to your MP to demand the government pays for free TV licences for the over 75s. Tell them how difficult you are finding it to make ends meet. You can use our guide to writing to your MP to help you.

Retired and Community branches: consider running a branch campaign, encouraging members to lobby your local MPs. We know that as few as 6 individual letters can get your MPs attention – and with a bit of planning, your branch can generate many more than this!

Plan a date to focus members’ attention, and create short videos for social media to raise the profile of the campaign and encourage others to get involved. Real-life stories are effective – a short, one-minute video with subtitles will catch people’s attention and get across the personal impact of this unnecessary cut.

Make contact with local older people’s groups in your area and ask them to get involved too.

Contact the press: your local TV and paper will be interested in stories of pensioners being threatened with fines, going to court and of stories of bailiffs coming around.

Liaise with your local Pensioners Association and National Pensioners Convention.

We know that some Unite retired members are refusing to pay the new licence fee out of principle. Some even tell us they are prepared to go to prison to make a stand against this injustice. And some Unite members will simply be unable to pay.

It’s still early days from when TV licence bills have been issued. It’s hard to know how far the BBC will go prosecuting the over 75s. However last year 5,632 people aged 60 to 74 were prosecuted for not having a TV licence, up from 4,689 in 2018.

If enough older people make this stand they could potentially clog up the courts, particularly in this time of Covid when it is dangerous for older people to go out of their homes or are not allowed out because of local lockdowns. This civil-disobedience could make the system unmanageable.

If you are aware of members in this situation, use our Know Your Rights factsheet to make sure they are aware of their rights. If any of your members fear they will be targeted by bailiffs, consider planning a ‘rapid response’ using your branch WhatsApp group, for example. Even a small number of members present at a member’s home when the bailiffs are there will make a huge difference in ensuring their rights are respected, and that the bailiffs do not gain entry illegally.

It is likely to be a minority of our members who find themselves in this situation. But this doesn’t mean we can’t cause problems and keep a spotlight on the issue!

Liaise with your local Pensioners Association and National Pensioners Convention.

www.unitetheunion.org/join
Know your rights

What could happen if you refuse to pay your TV licence?

Can’t Pay – Won’t Pay: Support Your Members

TV Licensing staff are employed by private firm Capita on the BBC’s behalf. Although they are described as “enforcement officers”, they do not possess any official powers of arrest and cannot enter homes or search property without permission or without a search warrant, and if refused entry to premises they should end the visit.

Fines before prison

The BBC will first try and get the licence payments by issuing fines if people refuse to pay. The fines could be up to £1,000. And although you can’t go to prison for not having a TV licence you can go to prison for refusing to pay your fines.

And if people refuse to pay their fines then the BBC could potentially send round bailiffs to recoup the debt.

You don’t have to let bailiffs in your home

The bailiff might say you have to pay them on the doorstep or you have to let them in - you don’t. They aren’t allowed to force their way into your home and they can’t bring a locksmith to help them get in. As an older person the bailiffs should treat you as vulnerable and not harass you.

Can I go to prison for not having a licence?

No, you can’t go to prison for not having a TV licence as it’s not a criminal offence. The court can only give you a fine for this. However, if you don’t pay, the court can take further action to collect the fine, including sending you to prison as a last resort.

This will usually only happen if you’re refusing to pay and other methods of recovering the fine, such as enforcement agents (bailiffs) or deductions from benefits have failed.

Unite free legal helpline

Members can take advantage of Unite’s free legal advice line: 0800 709 007. Members can call the Unite the Union legal helpline during office hours and seek advice on any legal issue. The service is limited to two telephone calls, of no more than 20 minutes in duration, on any one legal issue.

Contacts us with your stories or campaign ideas: community@unitetheunion.org

www.unitetheunion.org/join