

The BBC licence fee is a tax. It's a bad tax. But taxes...

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The debate on the BBC and the licence fee was fuelled by [Nicky Morgan yesterday](#).

Morgan said the licence fee will last until 2027. Thereafter she could not say. But she did say that she wants to decriminalise non-payment of the BBC licence fee.

I am aware of all the issues about the BBC. And I, for all the BBC's faults - and it has them, believe it vital that we retain a public broadcaster.

And I am also aware of all the flaws in the licence fee. It is a tax. It is an extremely badly designed tax. It is deeply regressive. It has wholly unintended incidence in some cases that means it is simply unjust. But, and this is a massive but, it is still a tax.

So what do you do about this poll tax, for that is what it is?

First, you have to enforce it whilst you have it, because unless you do you create precedents for all sorts of other issues, although I have to say that I wish the same enthusiasm for enforcement was used on those who commit much more serious, and deliberate, tax fraud.

And second, you have to consider that the alternative is. It cannot be another poll tax. It cannot be another charge that is not fit for the fragmented way many households now are. And it cannot be regressive. There is, even, a very good question as to why a hypothecated tax is appropriate for this isolated situation.

But if none of these scenarios is capable of resolution then the question has to be asked as to what the alternative is. Might that simply be funding by direct taxation? That would be entirely possible, and much fairer.

Or is there a broad digital tax to pay for something valuable - which has to be objective reporting?

I do not have the answers.

But what I am worried about is a government saying that a tax need not be enforced, because that is a very slippery slope in its own right, not because I like the BBC licence fee, but because that opens all sorts of doors to other aspects of non-enforcement that might suit those who have no love of tax and all the good it can do.

This is a debate worth having.