

Broadcast

TV sector urged to speak up about Brexit impact

By [Peter White](#) | 28 September 2017

CBI urges industry “to share their stories” to protect their businesses ahead of Britain’s exit from the EU



The British television industry needs to “speak up and say something” about the potential effects of Brexit to push the UK government to secure a good deal with the European Union.

Carolyn Fairbairn, director general of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), has urged broadcasters, producers and other firms within the entertainment sector “to share their stories” to protect their businesses ahead of Britain’s exit from the EU.

BBC group commercial director Bal Samra, A+E Networks UK senior vice-president of content and creative Heather Jones and Viacom International Media Networks chief executive David Lynn were in the audience as Fairbairn made her comments at The President’s Breakfast, an event organised by recruitment firm Robert Lindsay Associates.

“One of the things that I would urge everybody here to do is if it’s really going to affect you, speak up and say something because a lot of people would say the business voice has not been loud enough,” Fairbairn said.

Brexit priorities

The former ITV and BBC director of strategy added that the government is keen to find out the priorities of different sectors as it moves into a “new phase of negotiations”.

“This is the time to get them on the table because the shape of the deal could be [established] over the next six months,” she added.

Fairbairn said that the creative industries’ stories must chime with the public to influence matters. She pointed to recent statistics released by the Port of Dover, which predicted that people would spend longer in traffic jams following Brexit.

“The power of the anecdote is important,” she said. “What we learned in the referendum is that dealing in big macroeconomics cuts no mustard. You have to talk about real people and real things that matter.”

She highlighted the importance of the country keeping hold of international broadcasters that play out channels from London and said efforts must be made to dissuade firms such as Discovery Communications from moving to the European mainland. She also highlighted the need to ensure freelancers and employees are protected during the upheaval.

Brexit, she said, is a “short-term challenge” with “potentially long-term opportunities globally”.

Last week, Sir Peter Bazalgette’s [Creative Industries review](#) suggested that the UK sector can grow from £90bn to almost £130bn by 2025, while issuing a note of caution about the potential impact of Brexit.

Fairbairn said she was pleased that the creative industries are at the “heart of the industrial strategy going forward”, something that may not have been the case a few years ago.

“If I look back over the past five years, I believe there is a real difference in terms of how the creative industries are heard within government,” she said.

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Carolyn Fairbairn, CBI

Elsewhere, she said that the entertainment industry needs to step up and solve the skills shortages that are stifling the next generation of talent. She urged businesses to showcase the jobs that are available.

“Brexit is sucking the oxygen out of the [political] system so we need to step in as businesses. It’s about us doing more. We can all get into schools, and help kids have good experiences with business.”

She added that the UK also needs to create an environment that can spawn digital disruption.

“It’s really interesting as to why the UK hasn’t created one of the really big [digital] platforms – a Netflix or a Spotify. They’re mostly US but not all. The Scandinavian countries have pulled it off,” she said. “As we go into the AI and VR worlds, what would it take?”