

8 March 2004

BBC Charter Review Consultation
Department of Culture, Media and Sport,
2-4 Cockspur Street
London SW1Y 5DH

Dear Sirs.

In response to the leaflet announcing the consultation, we have the following responses.

What we most value; 1) News above all. We believe the quality of the BBC news service is streets ahead of any other available. We do not think it is biased, and it should remain at arms length from the Government. Its weather men put their message over very clearly, without gimmicks as seen on the commercial channels. Today and Panorama are not to be missed- though Panorama is on too late for our liking.

- 2) Historical and music (opera and classical) programmes.
- 3) Comedy- most of the old ones are very funny, but the new ones now labelled as comedy are mainly not worth looking at. There is too much crudity and too much deference to so-called celebrities. The game shows are abysmal. There is far too much time devoted to football, in total, and as an excessive proportion of all sport.
- 4) A major incentive for watching BBC programmes is the absence of advertising breaks. They ruin the enjoyment of any programme, and put a hiccup into both narrative and history.

Coping with changes in technology. There has been too much assumption that everyone has access to the internet, which is far from being the case generally. The BBC has been trying to push people on to digital, by putting a number of programmes which should be seen on BBC1 over to BBC4. We do see some of BBC4 via a set top box, and find some worthwhile programmes, though very restricted in viewing hours. Why oh why do they contain advertising breaks? We trust that that the BBC is not contemplating putting advertising on the digital programmes. That would be a major calamity, and totally unjustified when we pay a fee to listen in peace.

Radio 4 is very good, and the BBC overseas service is outstanding. Much of the overseas news and background information is far better than anything we can get on the domestic programmes. Local radio is valuable for traffic warnings, but is otherwise impossible, as there seems to be a permanent content of popmusic.

We believe that the BBC should certainly run commercial services; after all, having spent licence money in organising and producing programmes, it only makes sense to get money back to continue to make good programmes. If they were not permitted to operate

in this way, we should get fewer programmes worth while viewing. A lot of the stuff put out is clearly due to penny-pinching


The BBC should continue to be funded through a licence fee as now. It is quite clear that commercially funded work is shorn of quality, and is very expensive compared with the licence fee. Just look at the large sums charged by Sky, and the rubbish they produce.

The BBC is set up to give very good services. There are certainly poor programmes, but these can sometimes be explained by attempts to please every one – an impossible task. It does look as if the continued dumbing down is due to an obsessive desire to please the lowest common denominator. The BBC should remember that it has many devoted followers who do not appreciate the steady reduction in viewable output.

Organisationally, it seems that the Governors could be fewer in number to oversee the management, which generally is already responsibly run. For all the hullabaloo over the Today upset, it was a one-off. One might think that the whole organisation was tainted through one error, important though it was. Much of the noise was made by organisations with an axe to grind –the BBC is too good to aspire to, and they would like to weaken it.

A second body, independent of the overseers, but preferably not OFCOM, could be appointed to regulate the content. –OFCOM is much too biased to be considered as a watchdog for the BBC

Yours sincerely,


Alan and Margaret Agar

