

Sent: 13 December 2003 12:40
To: BBC Charter Review
Subject: BBC Charter Review

Dear Sir/Madam.

I am a member of the public and am responding to your request for my views on the role of the BBC into the future. I am also a GP by trade with an interest in education. I shall respond to each area as set out in your website.

What Do I Value About The BBC?

There are several areas where the BBC responds well compared to other providers. News, drama, children's TV, and comedy come to mind. It's international dimension and contribution to ethnic matters are without parallel.

It's independence should be cherished and enhanced. It's freedom from financial institutions such as the city, commercialisation through advertising and other economic means should be avoided as strongly as possible purely to promote this independence.

How Should The BBC adapt to cope with changes in Technology and Culture?

In relation to technology, the vast repertoire of programming which the BBC has should be moved to digital formats and should be available for public and commercial use. The shift towards online and other technologies should also be full throttle rather than half hearted so that access can be improved for all ages and groups of people in the UK. More investment should be available for the BBC to exploit cutting edge technologies so that it may remain a national and international provider of services for information and entertainment.

In relation to culture, it should primarily have a duty to represent the cultural diversity and mix of the UK population and then consider the needs of the rest of the world. Its role as a provider of services to countries outside the UK should be encouraged, particularly for those that have poor or biased internal information infrastructures.

What Do U Think of TV, radio, and online services?

In TV, the BBC has maintained a clear balance between managing the diverse needs of the population whilst recognising stiff competition from other terrestrial and digital providers. Its strategy has clearly been successful in retaining large numbers of audiences but also catering for specialist and ethnic groups. The future increase in competition means that the BBC needs to be able to develop it's programming strategy. It might be attractive to say that the increasing competition should mean that the BBC should drop some of the more popular programmes and concentrate on those things that others do not want to develop. I would argue against that as it excludes the needs of those unable to afford alternative means of accessing high quality programmes. Instead, I believe that for the BBC to compete in a changing world it needs to continue to develop as it has been, trying to compete in increasing public viewing figures but also maintaining its duty towards developing programmes for the less popular groups.

In radio, the need for local and national stations should be maintained, and more development to meet the needs of other groups ethnic and non-ethnic should be developed.

The online strategy should be extended to include commercial enterprises so that one may see texts, documents, music, TV programmes, bespoke information, and

other digital products being sold by the BBC online. This makes the material available to a wider audience at a reasonable cost and brings more money into the BBC.

Should the BBC run commercial operations?

I do think that the BBC should continue to extend and develop its commercial activities. Publications, sale of products (as opposed to assets) seems logical and healthy to ensure that the BBC can cope with the increasing commercialisation of the entertainment and IT markets. However, such commercial enterprise does not mean that it should lose sight of the fact that it is a public service broadcaster and independent from commercial pressures. Indeed, the BBC's finances should be enhanced by these commercial activities rather than replace the current financing arrangements including the license fee.

I would suggest the move towards advertising for TV programmes should be resisted at all costs. It would lose its uniqueness and would be the start of a trend of commercialisation that will turn the BBC into a corporate enterprise with its public service role coming second. In the long term the public would be the loser. Having watched TV programmes across the world where commercials are a fact of life, I can truly say that the BBC is like the NHS, it is unique in its excellence.

How Should We Pay for the BBC?

Continue with the license fee. Increase sale of commercial services and products but protect the BBC from financial problems through general taxation if necessary. Make the management more effective but do not lose loss making ventures purely on commercial grounds but consider their social, entertainment, and educational impact.

Is the BBC managed effectively?

As an outsider it is difficult to say. It seems the management structure functions well. Direct conflict with the government is a sign of the independence of the BBC. It is the independence which should be encouraged.

How Should The BBC be regulated and governed?

The dual role of the governors I think remains the best way forward.

How Should the BBC remain accountable to the public and parliament?

Increasing regulation of the BBC is inappropriate. It is an independent organisation like the national audit office and I see one of its roles as ensuring the legislature and executive are kept in check to ensure the healthy survival of democracy in the UK. Increasing the regulation of the BBC will hamper this much more important role, and it is right that it should not change its relationship with parliament.

In relation to the public, it is important that the BBC become more accountable. This could be by increasing its consultations with the public more often, becoming more open in its decision making activities, encouraging more contributions from the public for programme development, and developing partnerships with charitable and other NGO's to determine programme and service development.

I hope this helps.

Regards,

Sanjiv Ahluwalia