

From: Tim Black
Sent: 17 December 2003 00:30
To: BBC Charter Review
Subject: BBC Charter Review - Comments

As someone that is a UK citizen currently resident in the United States, my views maybe somewhat atypical (I still contribute via a TV license for my London property), and I happily concede that I am a devoted BBC fan, so responses may be biased.

1) What do you value most about the BBC?

As an ex-patriot I use the BBC website daily, and to a lesser extent the BBC World Service. When resident in the UK I utilised the BBC Digital TV and Radio services and the BBC Website on a daily basis.

I think that the coverage in terms of subjects, regions and communities is excellent and unrivalled globally in terms of being provided by one authoritative supplier. I would say that I utilise a great number of the BBC facilities/services, but would single out BBC Radio 4, BBC News and the BBC Website as particular "highlights".

The only "hole" is the sports and film coverage, which is largely monopolised by BSkyB. These pay per view or subscription services are better equipped (in terms of finances) to bid for such high cost items. As people seem to be willing to pay GBP 35 plus on a monthly basis for such services, yet the license fee represents a considerably smaller amount, albeit over a greater base of viewers.

2) How should the BBC adapt to cope with changes in technology and culture?

I think the BBC has done an excellent job in terms of pushing its Digital Services, and has embraced the enhanced quality available whilst exploiting Digital's ability to create a wider range programmes over the same bandwidth.

There is still plenty of progress to be made, such as moving to High Definition TV, Dolby/Surround Sound broadcasts (both TV and Radio), better connectivity to handheld devices (PDA), possibly the creation of an "On Demand" library of BBC programmes (Radio and TV.)

3) What do you think of the television, radio and online services the BBC provides?

I would struggle to find significant criticism on this point, possibly there has been a little "Dumbing Down" of content, in that original programming has shrunk in comparison to "Fly on the Wall" programmes, and that Channel 4 has possibly taken away some of the innovation/cutting edge flair from BBC 2.

4) Should the BBC run commercial services?

There are certainly supplementary products and services that spin off from programming, and as such should be encouraged. I think the concern is in terms of balance, where does the product opportunities begin to drive programming. I'd argue that the balance was broadly right.

5) How should we pay for the BBC?

I think the License fee or some form of subscription is the only prudent way of providing financing, it allows an autonomy for the BBC and as such creates a mandate to push innovative and non "mainstream" programming/content and technology. It also ensures a quality that is sadly lacking in a lot of other content, and I think this quality forces other UK broadcasters to focus on quality.

I alluded to an "On Demand" service on a subscription basis, (particularly for those that are non resident) may proved lucrative, as content is already being produced, this is merely a delivery mechanism.

6) Is the BBC organised in the most effective and efficient way?

I do not believe I am able to comment on this in detail, I believe it is effective and efficient, there is always room for improvement/change.

7) How should the BBC be run? How should it be regulated?

I think that the debacle over the reporting over the "Weapons of Mass Destruction", the Hutton Inquiry etc. has damaged both the Government and the BBC.

To its credit both the Director General (Greg Dykes), Chairman of Governors (Gavin Davis) and senior Journalistic staff have recognised that their handling of reporting and the resultant issues was something that with the benefit hindsight would have been handled differently.

I believe there now needs to be a separation of roles, with the Governors responsible for ensuring that the organisation is run efficiently, and is held to the highest standards of responsibility, but that complaints and investigations are handled by an autonomous group or independent Watchdog (OfCom?), that is truly independent from the BBC, Government and Commercial interests. The Governors would be responsible to ensure that investigations are fully co-operated with and that recommendations etc. are followed through to completion.

8) How do we ensure that the BBC is properly accountable to the public and Parliament?

I think that accountability is a difficult issue, as the BBC should be sensitive/responsive to its audience, but also needs to lead/challenge. Particularly with Digital Services it may be useful to temper ratings with a user grade in terms of quality, and to provide more forums to share strategy/direction and receive feedback.

Regards.

Tim Black

