

30 March 2004

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

Dear Sir

I am writing in response to the request for the comments of the listeners and viewers of BBC Radio and Television on the quality of service currently provided. I wish my response to be confidential.

Perhaps a good place to start would be to quote Lord Reith – the BBC should “inform, educate and entertain”. Until quite recently I think that, by and large, the BBC did do all three in a satisfactory way. Television programmes on natural history, costume dramas, sports coverage (especially of golf and tennis), many documentaries and some comedy series have been, and continue to be, of very high quality and are a pleasure to watch. Radio Scotland is also to be commended for the importance it places on programmes which encourage, as well as reflect, traditional Scottish culture.

I am, however, very concerned that in the last few years there has been a lowering of quality, particularly with regard to BBC1 television programmes. This is evident, for example, in the amount of time given to “Eastenders”, and in the tone of programmes such as “The Weakest Link”. I am also concerned at the content of some of the “trailers” now being inserted before the early evening news. Many of these focus on aspects of the coming programme which dwell on violence and discord. The news broadcasts themselves are sometimes being delivered in a manner more akin to the presentation of the tabloid newspapers than of serious reporting. Another of my concerns, although this is not a new one, is the lack of religious broadcasting beyond television’s “Songs of Praise”. I do not watch CBBC often enough to comment in detail but from the snippets which I do see I have the impression of too much coverage being given to “pop” culture. BBC children’s television has always had an excellent track record of providing stimulating and entertaining programmes which encouraged creativity and positive attitudes (the Blue Peter Christmas Appeals are a particularly good example of this). In an age when many children are watching television in their own rooms, without parental supervision, it is very important that what is offered is of the best quality available.

I am not qualified to comment on the financial aspects of the running of the BBC but I do believe that it must remain trustworthy, accurate in its reporting and politically impartial.

In closing, I have to say that I am more than surprised at the very poor publicity given to this consultation. Had it not been for a friend who is a member of the “Voice of the Listener and Viewer” I would have known nothing about it. Announcements in the

slot given to one of the new programme "trailers" at 6 p.m., with a similar announcement broadcast on radio would have been an excellent way of reaching a wide range of listeners and viewers. I hope this will be borne in mind for any future consultations.

Yours faithfully

Evelyn M. Blackie

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